THE BOOK OF RUTH

BY THE LATE SAMUEL COX

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

THE KING'S INSTITUTE
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY

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The book of Ruth.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY
Edited by the Rev. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

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By the Late
SAMUEL COX
Sometime Editor of "The Expositor"

New and Revised Edition

THE KING'S INSTITUTE
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY

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CONTENTS

PAGE

I.

THE BOOK AND ITS STORY . . . 7
Ruth i.-iv.

II.

PERSONS AND PLACES 22
Ruth i. 1, 2.

III.

A MISTAKE AND ITS ISSUES . . . 30
Ruth i. 3-5.

IV.

THE TEST OF LOVE 39
Ruth i. 6-19.

V.

THE EXILE'S RETURN 52
Ruth i. 19-end.

VI.

BOAZ THE STRONG MAN 58
Ruth ii. 1.

VII.

BOAZ THE COMPASSIONATE . . . 64
Ruth ii. 2-13.

Contents

PAGE

VIII.

SIGNIFICANT KINDNESS 72
Ruth ii. 14-end.

IX.

RUTH'S *MENUCHAH* 80
Ruth iii. 1.

X.

RUTH'S *GOEL* 88
Ruth iii. 2-end.

XI.

THE LAW OF THE *GOELIM* 99
Ruth iv. 1-8.

XII.

THE LAW INVOKED 109
Ruth iv. 9-end.

XIII.

CHRIST THE *MENUCHAH* OF THE WORLD . 125
Matt. xi. 28-30.

XIV.

CHRIST THE TRUE *GOEL* OF MEN . . 145
Ruth ii. 20.

I

THE BOOK AND ITS STORY

Ruth i.-iv.

Ruth and the Christian Reader.

In the whole gallery of Scripture portraits there are few which are more familiar to us, or more attractive, than the sweet figure of "Ruth standing amid the alien corn." Nor is it the least of her attractions to the Christian heart that the blood of Ruth ran in the veins of Jesus of Nazareth. In his genealogy of our Lord, St Matthew refers to or names (in addition to Mary) only four women,—Thamar (i. 3), Rahab (i. 5), Ruth (i. 5), and Bathsheba (i. 6). Among these four, Ruth easily holds the pre-eminence.

Thamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were women of dubious virtue, even when judged by the standards of antiquity; but, judged by the moral standard of any age, Ruth is not only pure and sweet as the fields in which she gleaned, she rises to an heroic pitch of unselfish devotion and love. Strength veiled in gentleness, heroism enhanced yet also concealed by humility, are as truly the characteristics of Ruth as of the Son of Man. We may find her aptest emblem in

Ruth i.-iv. those exquisite wild flowers which hide their perfect blooms under their broad green leaves, and only reveal their presence by the subtile fragrance they shed upon the air. Ruth is a true lily of the valley.

The Name Ruth.

It is not improbable, indeed, that her very name may be that of a flower, though not of the flower just mentioned. The common and accepted derivation of the Hebrew word *ruth* is "a friend"; and truly Ruth's face is as the face of a friend to us. But a learned and ingenious scholar has conjectured, with much probability, that *ruth* is an ancient Hebrew form of the Greek *ῥόδον*, the Latin *rosa*, the English *rose*, a word which denotes the *redness* of the flower; and, to say the least of it, it is very pleasant to think of Ruth as "*the Rose* of Moab."

Date of the Events.

At what period the events narrated in this Book occurred we are not expressly told. All we are told is that it was "in the days when the Judges judged" (i. 1). But as Israel was under the Judges for nearly five centuries—as long, let us say, as from the accession of the Plantagenet Henry V. to the present day—the phrase does not go far toward dating the Book. But another phrase in it (iv. 21, 22), from which we learn that Boaz was the great-grandfather of David, makes it pretty certain that the Judge, in

whose days Ruth the alien was admitted to the Commonwealth of Israel, was the venerable but most unhappy Eli. Ruth's son was Jesse's father; Jesse was the father of David. It is very probable, therefore, that, when he was a child, Ruth may have fondled Jesse in her arms. "The Rose of Moab" is closely connected with "the Darling of Israel." Ruth i.-iv.

We may be reasonably sure that the story of this Book was enacted while Eli was Judge in Israel; but when was it *written?* The question is not in itself of grave importance, perhaps; but to find the answer to it is a good and wholesome exercise for younger students of Scripture. For all the materials of the answer are contained in the Book itself; they need no scholarship to discover them; they are accessible to all. Date of the Book.

If, then, we read the Book of Ruth carefully, and with the purpose of fixing its date in our minds, surely the very opening words of the story must arrest our attention: "Now it came to pass, *in the days when the Judges judged,* that there was a famine in the land" (i. 1). Is that the tone of a man who is writing of the present or of a past age? Obviously it is the tone of one who speaks of the past. The Judges are no longer judging; the whole form of civil government has changed in the interval between the A Note of Time.

Ruth i.-iv. events narrated and the time at which the narrator writes. He is as evidently looking back as we should be were we to commence a story with the words, "Now it came to pass in the days when the Lord Protector sat on the throne of England."

This is our first "note of time," the first hint we get that a considerable interval must have elapsed between the time in which Ruth lived and the time in which the story of her life was told.

A Significant Incident.

As we read we come on two other hints which confirm our conclusion. In iv. 6-8 we are told of a curious legal custom. The next of kin to Naomi, when he refused to redeem her inheritance, and to take Ruth to wife, drew off his shoe and gave it to Boaz, so transferring the right of redemption to him. And the historian pauses to explain that this was "*formerly*" the legal mode in Israel "concerning redeeming, and concerning exchanging." But why should he stay to explain the custom if it had not fallen into disuse,—if it had not been so long disused that his readers had clean forgotten it? Yet old legal customs are very tenacious. They do not soon, or suddenly, become obsolete even with us, much less in the unchanging East. And, therefore, we may infer that the story of Ruth was written, not only after her death, but long after it.

Verses 17, 21, and 22 of the same chapter point to the same conclusion. For here we are told that Ruth had a son named Obed, Obed a son named Jesse, and Jesse a son named David. But how should David's name have been written before he was born? The story—unless at least we have recourse to the clumsy expedient of supposing additions made to the original Scripture by a later hand—must have been composed, at the very earliest, after that great Prince was born: *i.e.* it must have been written at least four generations—say from a hundred and twenty to a hundred and fifty years—after the events it records.

Ruth i.-iv. —And a Genealogical Detail.

To this extent, then, the Book dates itself. That it could not have been written *before* the time of David may be inferred from the fact that David's name is twice mentioned in it. That it was written *in* his time will become evident, I think, when we have caught the tone and purport of the story.

The Probable Date.

Briefly told, that story runs thus:—Under the pressure of a great famine, an ancient and honourable Hebrew family were threatened with want and misery. All that we are told of them indicates that they were Israelites indeed, devoutly attached to the land and worship of their fathers. We may be sure, therefore, that

The Story: The Departure for Moab.

Ruth i.-iv. it cost them many a pang to resolve to abandon their inheritance in the promised land and to seek bread among the idolaters of Moab. They went farther than their neighbours, who were exposed to the same pressure, only to fare worse.

Calamity. In seeking a livelihood they lost life. Three out of the four, Elimelech and his two sons, found a grave in the land in which they sought bread. Naomi is left alone, a childless widow. To all human appearance the family is blotted out from among the tribes of Israel. True, Naomi has her two daughters-in-law left; but these also are childless: and, moreover, they are strangers and aliens from the Hebrew Commonwealth, and of a race which had long been reckoned among the foes of the elect people.

Naomi's Return with Ruth. Naomi cannot endure to remain in the land which has proved so fatal to her affections and hopes. She returns to Bethlehem, but she returns "empty and afflicted," in great sadness of soul, because the Lord has dealt very bitterly with her. Destitute and hopeless, she has but one comfort. Ruth remains with her, and will not be persuaded to leave her. Ruth forsakes all—her country, her friends, her gods—that she may be true to her love for Naomi. But, like Naomi, she too comes to Bethlehem in poverty and sadness of heart.

When they arrive, although "the whole city is moved about them," no one offers them either succour or sympathy. Even the wealthy kinsmen of Elimelech—one of whom, as we happen to know, was of a very noble and generous temper—either because they are unaware of the calamities that had overtaken Naomi, or because they had disapproved of Elimelech's sojourn among the heathen, stand aloof from her.

Ruth i.-iv.

Her Cold Reception.

Ruth is her sole stay. But Ruth is willing to work, and even to beg, for her. At the time of harvest she goes into the fields to glean after the reapers. A kindly Providence leads her to the fields of Boaz, the wealthiest, though not the nearest, kinsman of Elimelech. Here her virtue and piety become known. Boaz honours her both for her unselfish devotion to Naomi, and because she, a heathen, has come "to trust herself under the wings of the God of Israel." For Ruth's sake, Naomi is restored to the goodwill of her kinsmen. By her modesty, her unselfishness, her pious reverence for Jehovah, the Moabitish woman conquers the Hebrew prejudice against the alien and the stranger. By these same virtues she wins the heart of Boaz and the rights of a wife and a mother in Israel.

Ruth's Loyalty.

Ruth's Conquest.

At every turn of the story we are made to feel that the Gentile Ruth is its heroine, and that

Ruth a Heroine.

Ruth i.-iv. she is its heroine simply because, in virtue and in piety, she excels even the Hebrew women. Yet she is no "saint," no devotee, no prophetess, but a very woman, and a woman

> "Not too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food."

Wide as is the gulf of time and social habit by which we are separated from her, nevertheless we feel that she is such a woman as would even now be the crown and charm of any household.

—Honoured by the Jews. And it surely speaks well for those ancient Jews, of whom we are apt to think, not altogether without reason, as the most jealous and exclusive of men, that they should have so frankly recognised the worth and charm of a daughter of Moab; that they should have preserved the story of her extraordinary sweetness and nobility till some man of God, moved thereto by the Holy Ghost, raised the tradition into a Scripture.

—And the Central Figure in the Story. The story, moreover, is written in no hostile or grudging spirit. The figure of the Gentile is not placed in the shade of the background, but in the centre and full light of the narrative. The Book is not called, as with some show of reason it might have been called when gathered into the Hebrew annals, the "Book of Naomi," or the

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"Book of Boaz," or the "Descent of David," but the *Book of Ruth*. *She* is placed in the foreground, and kept in it throughout. Ruth i.-iv.

No doubt the story is a love story, and is designed to set forth the power of love to overcome all the alienations, hostilities, and prejudices of nature and of that second nature which we call "habit." But it is not a story of romantic love between a young man and a young woman. It is the story of a woman's love for a woman; and, strangely as it would sound in the ears of our modern wits, it is the story of a young wife's passionate and devoted love for her mother-in-law! Ruth's tender, self-sacrificing affection for Naomi is the very charm of the story. It is in the strength of love that she abandons Moab and her father's house; it is in the strength of love that she also conquers the prejudices and jealousies of Bethlehem, and compels even Hebrews to admire her virtue and record her fame. And in that it was by her love for Naomi that Ruth was brought to know and serve the only wise and true God, we may see an illustration of the fact that men and women are often led to religion by natural affection, and rise to the love of God through their love for one another. The story, then, is a story in praise of charity; and it *shows* the charity it praises.

A Love Story.

—About a Daughter-in-Law.

Ruth i.-iv.

The Author's Charity.

We have no reason to doubt that it was written by a Hebrew; obviously it was one of the Hebrew Scriptures; and yet it contains no touch of the common Hebrew enmity against the Gentile. It is fair, and even generous, in the tone it takes toward those who were outside the Hebrew pale. It has no word of blame for Elimelech, although he left the land of his fathers to sojourn among the heathen; nor for Orpah, although she turned back from Naomi; on the contrary, it records her kindness and self-devotion in at least intending to remain with her "mother" till Naomi herself dissuaded her; while for Ruth it has no praise too high. It bases itself on the truth, which Christ has made the common property of the race, that in every nation a pure and unselfish love is acceptable to God. So far from asserting the exclusive privilege of the chosen people, it rather invites other races to come and put their trust under the wings of Jehovah, by showing that, as soon as they trust in Him, the privilege and blessing of Israel becomes theirs.

Its Bearing on the Authorship of the Book.

Now it is this singular charity for the outside world, this disposition to do justice and to show kindness to the Gentiles, which most of all renders it probable that the story of Ruth was rescued from the stammering and uncertain lips of Tradi-

tion and fairly written out in the reign of David. Ruth i.-iv. For nothing is more characteristic of David and his time, though it is a characteristic too commonly overlooked, than the fair and easy terms on which he met all foreigners, all men of alien races, and the rare fidelity with which these aliens clave to his cause, even when it was a losing cause. It is very strange, and very instructive when we think of it, that David, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, the flower and darling of his race, should have been wholly free from the Hebrew prejudice against men of heathen races,—that he should have called so many of them to his service, placed them close to his person, had them constantly about him, and have inspired them with so profound an attachment that they willingly laid down their lives for him.

David and the World beyond the Hebrews.

From the very first, from his encounter with the Giant of Gath onward, he displayed a faith in the religious convictions peculiar to Israel which never wavered, which, if equalled, was never surpassed. And yet no prince of Israel was ever on such friendly intimate terms with the heathen about him. He fearlessly commits his father and mother to the care of the King of Moab.[1] He gratefully records the kindness shown him by the King of Ammon.[2] When he took refuge in the cave, or

[1] 1 Samuel xxii. 3, 4. [2] 2 Samuel x. 2.

hold, of Adullam from the vindictive hatred of Saul, his body-guard was formed of brave men of foreign origin, who afterward became the captains of his army.[1] He tarried long in the city of Gath, and gained the goodwill of the king, although he had slain its gigantic champion; indeed, he so won the hearts of many of the *Gittites* that six hundred of them followed him throughout his chequered career, and were faithful to him even when Hebrew statesmen and soldiers deserted him.[2] He had no more loyal soldier in his host than Uriah *the Hittite*. When his son Absalom revolted from him, almost the only men who remained true to him were his foreign servants and captains. It was *an Ammonite* who supplied him with provisions for his hasty flight.[3] It was *a Phœnician* who went back to the camp of Absalom that he might serve David by thwarting the intrigues of Ahithophel.[4]

The Loyalty he commended.

The spirit of utter loyalty and devotion by which these gallant men were animated received, perhaps, its finest illustration in the interview of David with Ittai, *a man of Gath*.[5] When the treasonable designs of Absalom broke out, Ittai had but re-

[1] The *Cherethites* and the *Pelethites* of 2 Samuel viii. 18.
[2] 1 Samuel xxvii.; xxviii. 1, 2; xxix.; and 2 Samuel xv. 18.
[3] 2 Samuel xvii. 27-29. [4] 2 Samuel xv. 32-37.
[5] 2 Samuel xv. 19-22.

cently taken service with David. And therefore the king, generous and considerate even in his darkest hour of distress, says to him: "Wherefore goest *thou* with us? Return to thy place, and abide with the king, for thou art a stranger. If thou art banished, go to thy native land. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I to-day make thee go up and down with us, seeing I go whither I may? Return thou, and take back thy brethren. Mercy and truth be with thee." "Nay," replied the brave loyal stranger, "as Jehovah liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, in what place the lord my king shall be, whether in death or in life, even there will thy servant be also." Ruth i.-iv.

The Story and the Spirit of David's time.

One hardly knows which the more to admire, the man who could inspire a loyalty so pure and devoted, or the men who were capable of feeling it. But one thing is quite certain, viz., that in no other period of Jewish history do such friendly and cordial relations between Jew and Gentile come to view. And, therefore, we may well believe—what all the other indications of time in this Scripture suggest—that it was at this period that the Book of Ruth, which commemorates the fidelity and love of a Gentile, and that Gentile an ancestress of David, was written. It breathes the tone of David's life and time—the tone of a time in which all who feared God and wrought righteousness

Ruth i.-iv. were held in honour, whether they were of Hebrew or of Heathen blood.

The Book and the Canon.

Some wonder has been expressed by commentators and divines that the Book of Ruth should have been included in the Sacred Canon; that a love story, charming and idyllic as it is, should have found a place among the Scriptures of the Prophets. But, though we have a strange and irrational trick of smiling a little contemptuously, or a little ironically, when so much as the name of "love" is mentioned, yet no man who reflects on how great a part love plays in human life, and how much the sweetness and dignity of human life depend upon it, and how closely the love of our neighbour is connected with the love of God, will much marvel that God should have moved a holy man to record the love of Ruth for Naomi, or even the love of Boaz for Ruth, and so to set us "a pattern how we ought to live."

Its Place Vindicated.

The place of Ruth in Holy Writ needs no other vindication than this,—that, in her, love grew to heriosm. But if it did, an ample vindication might be found in the facts that this Book shows us, that every pure and unselfish affection leads to God, and is acceptable to Him; that it reveals Him to us as no less pleased by the goodness of a Heathen than by that of a Hebrew: and that it also shows us that, in their better moods, the very

Jews knew that there was no respect of persons with Him. Nor, in vindicating the honour conferred on this "love story," should we omit to note a fact in entire and happy accord with the catholic spirit of the Book, that the name of Ruth the Moabitess stands in the genealogy of that mighty Redeemer and Lord Who broke down the wall of partition which long divided the "circumcision" from the "uncircumcision"; and "in Whom there is neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free," since men of every race and of every condition become "one new man" in Him.

II

PERSONS AND PLACES

Ruth i. 1, 2.

1. Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

2. And the name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Beth-lehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

1. *Now it came to pass, in the days when the Judges judged, that there was a famine in the land. And a man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the Field of Moab, he, and his wife, and his sons.* 2. *And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem-judah. And they came into the Field of Moab and abode there.*

II

PERSONS AND PLACES

Ruth i. 1, 2.

Ruth i. 1, 2. The Times.

The Book of Ruth was, as we have seen, probably written in the time of David, that is, some century and a half after the events narrated in the Book occurred. The opening sentence of the Book shows that the Author was going back for his story to a past age. He speaks of "the days when the Judges judged" (i. 1) as over and gone. He is as obviously telling the story of a bygone time as an author of the present day would be were he to open with the sentence, "Now came to pass in the days when the Prelates of England were its Statesmen." And, probably, he indicates the days of the Judges as the date of his story in order to remind us that in those days, as there was no settled order of government, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Elimelech might go and come as he pleased, there being no authority to restrain him.

The Place.

The home of Elimelech was in Bethlehem— "*Bethlehem-judah,*" as the historian is careful to

Ruth i. 1, 2.

remark, in order to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the territory of the tribe of Zebulun. Now Bethlehem-in-Judah was remarkably well watered in comparison with other parts of Palestine. The pastures of its limestone downs were famous for their fine rich grass, and its valleys were covered over with corn. Its very name—Bethlehem, *i.e. House of Bread*—indicates its fertility. And, therefore, the famine which drove Elimelech from Bethlehem must have been extraordinarily protracted and severe; even the most wealthy and fertile parts of the lands must have been consumed by drought; there was no bread even in the very "House of Bread."

Elimelech and his Position.

Elimelech and his household were by no means likely to be the first to feel the pinch of want, or to feel it most keenly; for he came of a good stock, of a family that stood high in the tribe of Judah, and was a man of consideration and wealth. When his sorely-bereaved widow returned to her native place, "*all the city* were moved about her," as about some well-known person once held in general repute, and cried, "*This* Naomi!" (i. 19). She herself confesses, "I went out *full*, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty" (i. 21), evidently contrasting her present penury with her former opulence. The kinsmen of Elimelech, Boaz and that un-

named kinsman who declined to redeem his inheritance, were men conspicuous for high character and large possessions. So that we have every reason to believe that Elimelech was a man well endowed and in good esteem. The probability is that he was rich in flocks and herds, a sheep-master such as Bethlehem has constantly produced; and that it was to find pastures for his famishing flocks that he went to sojourn in Moab. Ruth i. 1, 2.

The Witness of the Family Names.

His own name, and the names of his wife and children, confirm this conclusion. For *Elimelech* is compounded of *El*—God, and *meleck*—king, and means "My God is my King"; and Hebrew scholars have noted that all names compounded with *meleck* are borne by distinguished persons. *Naomi*, or *Noomi*, means "the lovely, or gracious, one." *Mahlon* and *Chilion* probably mean "joy" and "ornament." And as we know that the Hebrew names were commonly expressive of character, and in the earlier ages even prophetic of character, we may perhaps infer from these names that the father was a kingly kind of man, the mother a lovely and gracious woman, and the two boys the very pride and joy of their parents' hearts.

The Family Home.

They are all expressly called "*Ephrathites* of Bethlehem-judah." *Ephrathah* was the ancient name of the district in which Bethlehem stood;

Ruth i. 1, 2.

and probably the word denotes the fruitfulness of this district as insured by its abundance of water, —*Euphrates* and *Ephrathah* seem to be kindred words. *Ephrathites*, then, are *natives* of the city or district as distinguished from mere sojourners or residents; *born* Bethlehemites, and not men of other districts who had come to settle in it; and possibly the antique word may also here convey an intimation that Elimelech belonged to one of the *ancient* and well-born families of the district.

So that, on the whole, we may conceive of Elimelech as a native of the fertile district of Bethlehem, a member of an ancient, noble, and distinguished family, a man of substance and mark, with a lovely wife and two bright promising sons fast rising into manhood.

The Family Migration to Moab.

This man, pinched by famine and fearing to lose his wealth, resolved to emigrate to the Field of Moab, which, untouched by drought, was green with grass and wealthy with corn. But why did he select *Moab*? The usual resort of the clans of Canaan and its vicinity in time of famine was Egypt. Why then, did not Elimelech, like his great forefathers, either go or send down into Egypt for corn?

Why not to Egypt.

The probability is that he would have sent or gone if the road to Egypt had not been closed.

All the notes of time in the Book imply that it was while the venerable but miserable Eli was Judge that Elimelech resolved to leave his ancestral fields: and while Eli was Judge there was perpetual war with Philistia. When the Philistines heard that the tribes of Israel were oppressed by famine, they would be sure to guard the high road to Egypt, in order to prevent their famishing foes from procuring supplies from the vast public granaries of that opulent and powerful empire. Ruth i. 1, 2.

With the way to Egypt stopped, Elimelech would naturally turn to the field of Moab; for Moab had much to attract both the farmer and the shepherd. The name "Moab" stands in the Bible for three districts on the east of the Dead Sea; but we can tell in which of these it was that Elimelech found a home and a grave, for one of these districts is expressly called "The *Field* of Moab,"—which is the technical phrase used throughout this Book; while another was called "The *Land* of Moab," and a third "The *Dry*," *i.e.* the Dry Canton—"of Moab." The Field of Moab.

This district or canton—"The Field of Moab," or Moab proper—has the precipices which border the Dead Sea on its western limit, a semi-circular sweep of hills on the east, behind which lies the Arabian Desert; on the north it is defended by

Ruth i. 1, 2.

the tremendous chasm down which the river Arnon foams; while on the south the two ranges between which it lies run together, meet, and shut it in. It was a high table-land, dotted with cities, on which the grass grew sweet and strong; and it has been in all ages, as it is even now, a favourite haunt of pastoral tribes.

Its People and their Wealth.

The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, who evidently knew Moab and the Moabites well, give us a graphic and artistic sketch of them. In their "burdens," or "dooms," the men of Moab "appear as high-spirited, wealthy, numerous, and even to a certain extent civilised, enjoying a wide reputation and popularity. With a metaphor which well expresses at once the pastoral wealth of the country and its commanding, almost regal, position, but which cannot be conveyed in a translation, Moab is depicted as the strong sceptre, the beautiful staff, whose fracture will be bewailed by all about him, and by all who know him. In his cities we discern 'a great multitude of people' living in 'glory' and in the enjoyment of great 'treasure'; crowding the public squares, the housetops, and the ascents and descents of the numerous high places and sanctuaries, where the 'priests and princes' of Chemosh, or Baalpeor, minister to the anxious devotees. Outside the towns lie the 'plentiful

fields,' luxuriant as the renowned Carmel, and the vineyards and gardens of 'summer fruits;' the harvest is being reaped and the 'hay stored in abundance,' the vineyards and presses are crowded with peasants gathering and treading the grapes, the land resounds with the joyful shouts of the vintagers."[1] Ruth i. 1, 2.

The Moabites, moreover, were of kin to Israelites; for, while the men of Israel were the sons of Abraham, the men of Moab were descendants of his nephew Lot; and though there was often war between the two nations, and war as bitter as kinsmen's quarrels commonly are, at least in the intervals of peace friendly and intimate relations were frequently maintained between individual members or families of the two races. Moabites Kin to Israelites.

Here, then, in the pastoral canton of Moab—which, though it plays a great part in ancient history, is hardly so large as the shire of Huntingdon, and is not so far from Bethlehem as Huntingdon from London—Elimelech might hope to find a good pasture for his flocks and herds if only he were able to purchase it, as no doubt he was, and would receive the welcome which awaits the "full," or wealthy, sojourner in almost every land. Elimelech's Hopes.

[1] George Grove, in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Moab."

III

A MISTAKE AND ITS ISSUES

Ruth i. 3-5.

3. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died ; and she was left, and her two sons.

4. And they took them wives of the women of Moab ; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

5. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them ; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

3. *And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died ; and she was left, and her two sons.* 4. *And they took them wives of the women of Moab ; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth : and they dwelt there about ten years.* 5. *Then, died these two also, Mahlon and Chilion ; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.*

III

A MISTAKE AND ITS ISSUES

RUTH i. 3-5.

Ruth i. 3-5. Elimelech's Mistake.

WAS it *wrong* of Elimelech to abandon his native land, in order to sojourn with Moab until the famine was past? No doubt it was wrong. Not that emigration is a sin, or even emigration to an alien, and sometimes hostile, land. We, perhaps, are better pleased to hear of Englishmen migrating to one of our English colonies than to hear of them sailing to a land in which the English name is, or may be, held in suspicion and dislike. But who would say that it was *wrong* for an English family, on the compulsion of some strong motive, to settle in France, or Spain, or South America?

Why Elimelech was wrong.

What made it wrong for Elimelech to migrate to Moab, wrong according to the Old Testament standard, was that he was abandoning his place among the elect people, to sojourn among heathen whose social life, whose very worship, was unutterably licentious and degrading. If it were right of *him* to abandon his place, it would

Ruth i. 3-5.

not have been wrong for all Bethlehem, nay, for all Judah; and then how could the Divine purpose concerning Israel have taken effect? Elimelech was a wealthier man than many of his neighbours; and if *they* could bear the brunt of famine rather than forsake the land of their fathers and expose their children to the seductions of heathen licence, why could not he?

True, Elimelech is not directly blamed for his error in the Book of Ruth, which is written in the most considerate and generous tone throughout; but that the writer of the Book thought him to blame, and held the calamities which fell on him and his house to be a judgment on his sin, there is scarcely room to doubt.

The Blows that fell.

What these calamities were we are told in i. 3-5. Elimelech lost his life while seeking a livelihood, and found a grave where he had sought a home. And, apparently, this 'judgment' fell on him at once, judgment treading on the very heels of offence. Before his sons were married he was taken away from the evil to come. For we can hardly doubt that it would have seemed evil to him that his sons should marry strange women, women of a race of which God had said, "Thou shalt make no covenant with them: and thou shalt not make marriage with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto their

son, nor shalt thou take their daughter for thy son; for it would turn away thy children from me, and they will serve false gods" (Deut. vii. 2, 3, 4). Ruth i. 3-5.

The sin of these young men in marrying strange women is not expressly denounced as a sin in the story, any more than that of their father in forsaking the land of promise, although it is denounced in the Targum, which commences verse 4 thus: "*They transgressed the commandment of the Lord*, and took foreign wives from among the daughters of Moab." But no one can read the Old Testament without feeling that they sinned against the law: for, to the Hebrews, marriage was a religious covenant; and St Paul does but utter an admitted and familiar truth when he asks, "What communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.) The reason of the law is given in the passage just cited from Deuteronomy,—"they will turn away thy children from me, and they will serve false gods." The Sin of the Sons.

The daughters of Moab were specially obnoxious to the faithful Israelites. They appear to have been among the most fascinating, and the most wanton and profligate, women of antiquity. Their gods—Chemosh, Moloch, Baal-peor The Evil Women of Moab.

Ruth i. 3-5.

—were incarnations of lust and cruelty. These gods demanded human sacrifices. Children were cast into their burning arms. In their ritual sensuality was accounted piety.

Two Exceptions.

True, Mahlon and Chilion were exceptionally fortunate in their wives. *They* were not turned to the service of false gods, though there was grave reason to fear that they might be; but, on the other hand, neither did they turn their wives to the service of the only true God. It was not till after her husband's death that Ruth learned to take shelter under the wings of the Lord God of Israel (ii. 12); and Orpah, as we are expressly told (i. 15), "went back to her people and *her gods*."

The Happy Home.

Nevertheless, the home of Naomi in the Field of Moab seems to have been a very happy, although it was not by any means a prosperous, home. Gradually, as the years passed, the widow and sons of Elimelech appear to have lost all that they had, so that, at her return to Bethlehem, Naomi came back "empty." But, for once, love did not fly out of the window as poverty stepped in at the door; for Naomi prays (i. 8) that the Lord will deal kindly with Ruth and Orpah, because *they had dealt kindly with the dead and with her.*

Significant Names therein.

Orpah, probably, means "*hind*," and Ruth "*rose*,"—pretty and pleasant names both, denoting grace and fragrant beauty. Mahlon and

Chilion mean "*joy*" and "*ornament.*" So that at the head of the diminished household we have the lovely and gracious Naomi; and then "Joy" has for wife the beautiful and fragrant "Rose," and "Ornament" the graceful "Hind." The very names are idyllic, and seem to indicate, what the facts confirm, that the household was a singularly pure and happy one, characterised by a certain rustic grace and refinement. Ruth i. 3-5.

But "Death strikes with equal foot the rustic cottage and the palaces of kings." And after ten years, in which the members of this notable family seem to have opposed a constant face to the austere and threatening brow of Misfortune, and to have grown the dearer to each other for the sorrows and calamities they shared together, Mahlon and Chilion, still young men, followed their father to the grave, and Naomi was left a childless widow. Songs of mirth were exchanged for songs of mourning. The three men of the household had gone to their long home, and the three bereaved women were left to weep together and to comfort each other as best they might. The Coming of Death

Thus far the Book of Ruth resembles that Symphony of Beethoven, in which the songs of birds, the cheerful hum of a holiday crowd, and all the pleasant voices of a rustic merry-making,

Ruth i. 3-5.

are hushed by the crash of a sudden and threatening storm.

The Influence of Character.

The fact that both Ruth and Orpah were minded to accompany the destitute Naomi, when she returned to her native city, confirms all that has been said of the pure and happy family life of the household into which they had been admitted. Mahlon and Chilion must have been men of worth and character, to win so sincere and stedfast an affection from these two daughters of Moab. And the gracious Naomi must have carried herself both wisely and graciously to these young wives, or she would not have inspired them with a love so devoted and self-sacrificing.

—And of true Home Life.

And yet, when once they had breathed the pure atmosphere of a Hebrew home, it is no marvel that Ruth and Orpah were reluctant to lose it. To the men of Moab women were but toys to be played with while they retained their charm, and to be cast aside so soon as some brighter toy took the eye. But in ancient Israel, as happily also in Great Britain, the worship of God was, as a rule, conjoined with a pure domestic life, a life made pure and sweet by chastity and kindness, by respect for women, by love for children. No doubt Ruth and Orpah were profoundly impressed by the purity and fidelity which distinguished the Hebrew from

the Moabitish home, and repaid it with tenderness and a grateful attachment to the family into which they had been welcomed. It speaks well for them that, after living with them for ten years and watching with motherly jealousy how they bore themselves to her sons, Naomi can thank them with impassioned sincerity and tenderness for their "kindness" to the dead and to her. Ruth i. 3-5.

Their kindness to *her* is even more remarkable, perhaps, than their kindness to their husbands; for the ancient combine with modern authors to complain of the unhappy relations which obtain between the daughter- and the mother-in-law, and in laying the blame of it on the latter. "The mother-in-law has forgotten that *she* was ever a daughter-in-law," says an old German proverb; Tacitus speaks of *novercalia odia;* Terence laments that all mothers-in-law have ever hated their sons' wives; Juvenal affirms that "domestic concord is impossible so long as the mother-in-law lives; and Sidonius Apollinaris, a Christian writer of the fifth century, uses a word "to act as a step-mother" in the sense of "to treat harshly." The Relation of Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law.

No doubt, among selfish people, who confound jealousy with love, the relation is apt to be a source of irritation and discord; the mother is loth to relinquish her rights in her son, and the wife is forward to assert her rights in her husband: —Not necessarily unhappy.

Ruth i. 3-5.

both are apt to forget that their common love for the same person should draw them together and make them of one heart and mind. But in lands where the home-life is pure and tender, and among persons of an unselfish and generous nature, even this relation may, and often does, become a very happy one.

Especially amongst the Hebrews.

Possibly, we may accept it as one of the weightiest testimonies to the tenderness and purity of domestic life among the better Hebrews, that both the prophet Micah (Micah vii. 6) and our Lord Himself (Luke xii. 53) imply that the tie between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law was as close and sacred as that between mother and daughter, or father and son; that both affirm it to be one of the last signs of utter social division and corruption when the daughter-in-law rises up against her mother-in-law. "Happy is the nation that is in such a case." For men labour, as well as fight, for hearth and altar as for nothing else; and when the hearth is itself an altar, when the home is bright and sacred with a Divine Presence and law, then indeed there is no place like home.

IV

THE TEST OF LOVE

Ruth i. 6-19.

6. Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.

7. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

8. And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

9. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

10. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

11. And Naomi said: Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

12. Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;

13. Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.

14. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

15. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back

unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

16. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

17. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

18. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

19. So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem.

6. *Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, and returned from the Field of Moab; for she had heard in the Field of Moab that the Lord had remembered his people to give them bread.* 7. *And she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.* 8. *Then said Naomi to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.* 9. *The Lord grant you that ye may find an asylum, each in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.* 10. *And they said unto her, Nay, but we will return with thee unto thy people.* 11. *And Naomi said, Return, my daughters: why will ye go with me? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?* 12. *Return, my daughters, go; for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I should say, I have hope; if even to-night I should have a husband, and should also bear sons;* (13) *would ye tarry till they were grown? would ye, for them, shut yourselves up from having husbands? Nay, my daughters. Yet is it much more bitter for me than for you, since the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.* 14. *And they lifted up their voice and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her.* 15. *And she* (Naomi) *said, Behold, thy sister-in-law has gone back unto her people, and unto her gods; return thou also after thy sister-in-law.* 16. *And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest*

The Test of Love

I will lodge: thy people is my people, and thy God my God: (17) *where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.* 18. *So when she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she ceased to dissuade her.* 19. *So they two went on till they came to Bethlehem.*

IV

THE TEST OF LOVE

Ruth i. 6-19.

Ruth i. 6-19. A Noble Passage.

Than the scene depicted in the latter part of this chapter there is hardly any more beautiful and affecting in the whole range of the Old Testament Scriptures. All three actors in it are admirable, and are admirably portrayed. Even Orpah shows a love and a devotion which command our respect, although her love did not rise to the full heroic pitch; while of Ruth and Naomi it is hard to say which is the more admirable,—Naomi, in putting from her her sole comfort and stay, or Ruth, in leaving all that she had to become the stay and comfort of Naomi's declining years. The exquisite and pathetic beauty of the scene has been recognised from of old, and has inspired painter after painter, musician after musician; while Ruth's famous reply to Naomi's dissuasive entreaties takes high rank among the sentences which the world will not willingly let die.

It is not an easy, nor is it an altogether

pleasant, task to break up this pathetic story into its separate sentences, that we may analyse them and see what they mean and imply; but it is a necessary task; for only as we trace out the meaning of the separate sentences can we hope to reconstruct the story with fuller knowledge, and permit it to make its due impression upon us. Ruth i. 6-19.

Whether Elimelech and his wife felt that they were entering on a doubtful course when they left the Holy Land to sojourn with the heathen of Moab, we have no means of knowing. But we have much reason to think that, during her ten years' sojourn in the Field of Moab, Naomi came to regard it as a sinful course. The loss, first of her husband, and then of her sons, came upon her as a Divine rebuke; and as she laid her sons, cut off in their prime, in an alien grave, the thought and purpose of return, return to God as well as to the land of God, seem to have taken possession of her heart. Naomi's view of the Sojourn in Moab.

This purpose was probably strengthened both by the hope that, in her poverty and bereavement, she would receive help and comfort from her wealthy Hebrew kinsmen, and still more by the happy tidings which now reached her, that the famine was at an end, that the valleys of Bethlehem were once more covered over with The Old Home to be Re-sought.

Ruth i. 6-19.

corn and its hills with flocks. In the fine Hebrew phrase, "*The Lord had remembered His people, to give them bread.*"

For God was again Blessing it.

The pious Hebrew saw God in all things. What we call "the bounty of Nature" was, for him, the immediate gift of God. His bread came straight from Heaven, though it came through the processes of husbandry and the benignity of the seasons, and showed that God was thinking, and thinking graciously, of him. And when the fields yielded no food, and the flock was cut off from the fold and the ox from the stall, *that* was because God had "forgotten" him.

God's "forgetting."

The pious Israelite did not, however, conceive of God as losing sight of him in the vastness of His empire and the multiplicity of His cares. What he meant by God's forgetting him was that God was offended with him for his sins, was ceasing to be gracious to him, had purposely put him out of His mind, and was therefore refusing to make his fields and toils fruitful to him. He believed, what we too much forget, that Nature is instinct with a Divine Presence; that it rises into life and fruitfulness when that Presence is auspicious, and sinks into sterility and death when that Presence is clouded with sorrow and indignation at the sins of men. When the Lord "remembered" His people, *i.e.* when He saw

with pleasure that they were doing righteousness and showing mercy, then He gave them bread. When He turned away from their bold affronts against His righteous and loving Will, then famine and disaster stalked through the land. Ruth i. 6-19.

In *this* sense God had forgotten Israel for ten years. And, no doubt, the calamities which signified His displeasure with them produced their usual effect, — inducing humility and penitence. Now, therefore, He remembers them, and once more the land smiles with plenty. And now that He is once more gracious, may there not be grace and a blessing even for the impoverished and afflicted Naomi, if she too returns to Him and once more takes shelter under His wings? Perchance there may. At all events she will put Him to the proof. And so she starts on her homeward way.

Israel thus "forgotten"

—And "remembered again."

But Naomi does not start alone. Her two daughters-in-law resolve to accompany her. She, apparently, is not aware of their intention, and supposes they have only come to see her off and indulge in a last embrace, although *they* regarded themselves as already on the way to the land of Judah (verse 7).

Naomi sets out—and not alone.

When, therefore, they reach the Ford of the Arnon, on the northern boundary of the Field of Moab, or, perhaps, when they reach the Fords

The Turning-Point.

Ruth i. 6-19.

of the Jordan, the eastern boundary of Judah, Naomi bids them return each to her mother's house, and prays, both that the Lord will deal kindly with them, as they have dealt with her dead and with her, and that He will grant that they may each find an "asylum" in the house of a new husband. As she clasps them in a parting embrace, they lift up their voices and weep. They protest, "Nay, but we will return with thee unto thy people." And, now, Naomi has the delicate, difficult task of breaking to them, as gently as she may, the sad secret that, if they go with her, they will find no welcome from her people, no kindness from any but herself.

Why Naomi says "Return."

If we would understand the scene, and especially the stress laid on these young widows finding new husbands, we must remember that in the East of antiquity, as in many Eastern lands to this day, the position of an unmarried woman, whether maid or widow, was a very unhappy and perilous one. Only in the house of a husband could a woman be sure of respect and protection. Hence the Hebrews spoke of the husband's house as a woman's "*menuchah*," or "rest"—her secure and happy asylum from servitude, neglect, license. It was such an "asylum" of honour and freedom that Naomi desired for Orpah and Ruth. But, as she had to explain to them, such an "asylum,"

The New Asylum.

while it might be open to them in Moab, would be fast closed against them in Judah. In marrying them her sons had sinned against the Hebrew law. That sin was not likely to be repeated by Israelites living in their own land. Yet how is Naomi to tell them of this fatal separation between the two races? How is she to make these loving women aware that, if they carry out their resolve to go with her, they must resign all hope of honour and regard?

Ruth i. 6-19. —Not in Judah.

She discharges her difficult task with infinite delicacy. They, of course, had no thought of marrying any sons that might hereafter be born to the widowed Naomi. Such a thought could not possibly have entered their minds. Why, then, does Naomi lay such emphasis on the utter unlikelihood of her having sons, and of their waiting for them even if she should have them?

Naomi's Argument.

Simply to convey to them that, if they went with her, *they would have no hope but in herself.* What she meant was: "I know and love you: and, had I sons, I would take you with me, that in their homes you might find the asylum every woman needs and craves. But I have none, nor am I likely to have any, nor could you wait for them if I had. And, outside my household, there is no prospect for you; for the men of Israel may not take to wife the daughters of Moab. Alas, it

Ruth i. 6-19.

is more bitter for me to tell you this than for you to hear it. It is harder for me than for you that we must part. But the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. I have no hope for the future. I must walk my darkened path alone. But you, you may still find an asylum with the people of your own race. *Your* future may be bright. You will at least have one another. Go, then, and return each to her mother's house."

The Outlook and its Influence.

This, I apprehend, was what Naomi meant by the words which sound so strangely to us (verses 11-13): this was what Ruth and Orpah would understand her to mean. And if we cannot wonder that the prospect proved too cheerless and perilous for Orpah's love, let us all the more admire the constancy of her whom even this prospect could not terrify. Ruth risked everything which a woman holds dear rather than leave her "mother" to walk and suffer alone. And it may be doubted whether in all the crowded records of womanly heroism and self-sacrifice we anywhere meet a courage and devotion surpassing hers.

Naomi's further Pleading.

And yet, in this contest of self-sacrificing love, it is hard to tell whether the palm should be awarded to Ruth or to Naomi. Has not Naomi discharged her full duty of dissuasion in placing the discomforts and dangers of her lot before her

daughter? She, at all events, thinks that she has not. When Orpah has kissed her and gone back, while Ruth is still "cleaving" to her, she renews her entreaties and dissuasions. "Thy sister-in-law has gone back to her people *and to her gods;* go thou also. It is not simply, or mainly, that we belong to different races: we worship different gods. It is *this* which really separates us, and makes it impossible that you should find an asylum in Judah. Return, then, after thy sister." Ruth i. 6-19.

When we consider how dark and solitary Naomi's path must have been had Ruth yielded to her entreaties, we cannot but feel that these two noble women were well matched, that it is hard to say in which of them love was the more generous and self-forgetting. If, in the judgment of the world, Ruth carries off the palm, it is, in part, because we expect more of a mother in Israel than of a daughter of Moab: but it is still more, I think, in virtue of the exquisite and pathetic words in which her reply to the dissuasions of Naomi is couched. Her vow has stamped itself on the very heart of the world; and that, not because of the beauty of its form simply—though even in our English Version it sounds like a sweet and noble music—but because it expresses, in a worthy form and once for all, the utter devotion of a genuine and self-conquering Who was the greater? Ruth's Vow.

Ruth i. 6-19.

love. It is the spirit which informs and breathes through these melodious words that makes them so precious to us, and that also renders it impossible to utter any fitting comment on them. They shine most purely in their own light.

> "*Intreat me not to leave thee,* or *to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people* shall be *my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also,* if ought *but death part thee and me.*"

One wonders where the woman found breath to utter such words as these as she lay weeping on Naomi's breast, that her voice did not break into inarticulate sobs and sighs under the weight of so impassioned a tenderness.

A Comprehensive Reply.

I cannot pretend to interpret them, to dwell on them and bring out their beauty. Every heart must do that for itself. But three points should be noted by all who study them.

(1) That in these words Ruth meets every dissuasive plea of Naomi.

Naomi had no home, no asylum, to offer her; and Ruth replies, "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge."

The Test of Love

Naomi reminds her that she is going among an alien people, who worship another God; and Ruth replies, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Ruth i. 6-19.

Naomi urges that there will be no brightness, no *life*, in her life; and Ruth replies that she is content to die, so that she may share Naomi's grave.

(2) That Ruth adopts Naomi's God *as yet* purely from love of Naomi.

And (3) that she shows how instantly and entirely she adopts Naomi's religion by sealing her vow with the Hebrew oath and by calling on the God of the Hebrews: "*Jehovah* do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

When, from this impassioned invocation of the Name of the Lord, Naomi perceives that Ruth is "stedfastly minded" (verse 18) to go with her, she ceases to dissuade her: and the two noble women, united in an indissoluble bond of love, go on their way side by side.

V

THE EXILE'S RETURN

Ruth i. 19-end.

19. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi ?

20. And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara : for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

21. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty : why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me ?

22. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab : and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

19. *And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, This Naomi !* 20. *And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara, for the Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me.* 21. *I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty. Why, then, call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me ?* 22. *So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, who came back out of the Field of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley-harvest.*

V

THE EXILE'S RETURN

Ruth i. 19-end.

Ruth i. 19-end. Naomi and the Bethlehemites.

Thomas Fuller's comment on verse 19 is: "Naomi was formerly *a woman of good quality and fashion,* of good rank and repute; otherwise her return in poverty had not so generally been taken notice of. Shrubs may be grubbed to the ground, and none miss them; but everyone marks the falling of a cedar. Grovelling cottages may be levelled to the earth, and none observe them; but every traveller takes notice of the fall of a steeple. Let this comfort those to whom God hath given small possessions. Should He visit them with poverty, and take from them what little they have, yet their grief and shame would be the less; they should not have so many fingers pointing at them, so many eyes staring on them, so many words spoken of them; they might lurk in obscurity; it must be a Naomi, a person of eminency and estate, whose poverty must move a whole city."

Ruth i. 19-end.

Their Reception of the Widow.

In these days we should hardly think of calling Naomi "a woman of good quality and fashion"; but Fuller's inference from the general excitement caused by her return is, on the whole, a fair one, though it is somewhat quaintly worded. She must have been a woman of substance and repute about whom all Bethlehem was moved. Their exclamation, "*This* Naomi!" (verse 19) expresses the general astonishment at the change which had passed upon her.

This "Naomi!"

No doubt the little hamlet had been all aflame with gossip when, ten years before, the rich sheep-master, Elimelech, had left it, and many pious brows had been shaken over his sin in going to sojourn among the Heathen. And, no doubt, on Naomi's return, many who would have shared that sin if they could, and many who had committed far worse sins than any of which she had been guilty, once more shook their heads in grave rebuke, and were forward to recognise the judgments of an offended God in the calamities which had befallen her. It may be feared that there was more blame than pity in the ejaculation, "*This* Naomi!"

Naomi's Confession.

Naomi confesses both the impoverishing change that had passed upon her and the sin of which she had become conscious, and is more than ever conscious now that she sees it reflected from the

rebuking faces of her former neighbours. The passionate exclamation with which she meets their wonder and reproach is full of pathos: "Call me not Naomi, but call me *Mara* [bitter], for the Almighty hath dealt very *bitterly* with me! (verse 20). Life is no more pleasant to me, but full of bitterness. Call me, then, by a new name, answering to my new condition, a name as bitter as my afflictions." Ruth i. 19-end.

There is, too, a strange blending of sadness and generosity in her confession: "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home empty. . . . The Lord hath testified against me; the Almighty hath afflicted me" (verse 21). For while, like her neighbours, she feels the humbling contrast between her former wealth—wealth of happiness and of hope as well as of possessions—and her present poor and unfriended condition, she also feels that it was *because* she went away when she was full that she has been brought home empty. She attributes her "emptiness" to the Lord, but her going away to herself alone. *That* was not the Lord's doing; it was a sin against His will. Nor was it the doing of Elimelech and her sons: at least, she casts none of the blame of it on them, although, in all probability, it was they who decided to go, and she had but followed their wishes or command. —Of Sin against God's will.

Ruth i. 19-end. The Blame Accepted.

Naomi takes the whole blame on herself. She confesses that, in leaving "the land of promise," she was walking after her own will, not the will of God. But, though she confesses her own sin, she utters no reproach against the beloved dead. "I went because it was my will to go; and now God has taught me, by all I have suffered and lost, that it was wrong to go. He has justly emptied me of all my possessions, all my hopes."

Bethlehem is Merciless.

The whole city was moved at her return; but no one seems to have been moved by her penitence and grief. She is left alone, save for "Ruth *the Moabitess*" (verse 22), as the sacred historian once more calls her, to bring out the contrast between the tenderness of this heathen outcast and the austerity of the pious Hebrews of Bethlehem.

But the Outlook Brightens.

Thus far, then, the story is sad enough. It is a story of loss, of shame, of sore bereavement. But for the fidelity of Ruth we should leave Naomi—in her native place, too, and among her kin—alone, deeming herself forsaken of God and afflicted, because she saw herself abandoned and despised of men. Even the first Chapter of the Book, however, does not close without a hint of brighter days in store. Love and fidelity are always acceptable to God. And hence we might infer that the love and fidelity of Ruth would, in due time, meet with their reward.

Ruth i. 19-end. The Dawn breaking.

We are not, however, left to inference and conjecture. The last verse of the Chapter tells us that it was "*in the beginning of the barley-harvest*" that Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem. And we know that before the harvest was over the mercy of God to these two loving women rejoiced over the judgments with which He had afflicted them. It was in the harvest-field that Ruth met Boaz, and with Boaz that "asylum" of honour and freedom which Naomi had thought it impossible for her to meet among the sons of Israel. The night of weeping is past; a morning of joy is about to break upon them. How, and how wonderfully, this new day dawned on their sad but faithful hearts, we shall see as we study the succeeding Chapters of the Book.

VI

BOAZ THE STRONG MAN

Ruth ii. 1.

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech ; and his name was Boaz.

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a valiant hero, of the family of Elimelech ; and his name was Boaz.

VI

BOAZ THE STRONG MAN

Ruth ii. 1.

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm xxx. 5). We have seen how dark Naomi's night was, how she came back "empty" to the home from which she went out "full." And in Chapter II. we are pathetically reminded of the utter penury and destitution which were implied in the word "empty." Once opulent and beloved, Naomi was reduced to straits so sore that she was compelled to let her beloved daughter go and glean among the rude reapers, that she might bring home a morsel of bread. Nay, so sore was the need that, even as she ate the parched corn in the harvest-field, Ruth set aside a portion of it to take home with her for Naomi's use.

Ruth ii. 1.

Naomi's Straits.

Nor was it simply the loss of husband and sons, of wealth and consideration, by which the spirit of Naomi was oppressed. To the pangs of hunger, and grief, and shame there was added the still keener torture of religious despair. To

Judgment and Mercy.

Ruth ii. 1. herself and her neighbours she seemed "smitten of God and afflicted." And hence she broke into the exceeding bitter cry, "*The Lord* hath testified against me, and *the Almighty* hath afflicted me."

The Lord *had* testified against her and afflicted her. But the judgments of God ever have a purpose of mercy; and we are now to see how His mercy shone through the cloud of judgment, turning night into day.

Boaz, the "Valiant Hero."

Among the kinsmen of Elimelech was a certain Boaz, a man who had distinguished himself in war, and who is therefore described, as Gideon and Jephthah are described, as "a valiant hero," *i.e.* a brave captain or commander, whose military exploits were well known to the men of his generation. It is unfortunate that our Version renders the Hebrew phrase "a mighty man of wealth"; for though Boaz was rich, and was as able in peace as in war, in the Hebrew the phrase undoubtedly points to his valour and capacity in the field of battle. His very name means "son of strength"; and, no doubt, his "strength," his vigour of body and of spirit, had been displayed against the enemies of Israel, *i.e.* the Philistines, with whom there seems to have been almost constant war while Eli was Judge. "None but the brave deserve the fair"; and, considering the time in which they lived, we cannot but be

a little glad, for Ruth's sake, that Boaz had proved himself a brave soldier in the stricken field. **Ruth ii. 1.**

But there is a higher courage than that which faces death without fear. This, too, as we shall see, Boaz possessed. He had "the courage of his convictions." When once he saw a course of action to be just and generous, he did not fear to take it, however unusual it was, and though his neighbours had much to say against it. Above all, he was not ashamed of his *religious* convictions. It was as natural to him to express them as it was to breathe. As often as we see him we see that "the law of the Lord is in his heart," that it influenced the whole round and detail of his life. **—And the Man of Convictions.**

How came it to pass, then, that a man so bold and generous and pious left Naomi unhelped and uncomforted in the time of her penury and grief? We cannot altogether tell. He may have been absent on military service when she returned from the Field of Moab, and have only got leave of absence, as soldiers then commonly did, during harvest. He may only just have heard the tale of Naomi's sorrows when he met Ruth in the harvest-field. And, indeed, his words to Ruth, "It hath been fully *shown* me all that thou hast done," imply that he had only *heard* of what most of the other inhabitants of Bethlehem had seen, **Why had he not helped Naomi?** **Possible Explanations.**

Ruth ii. 1. that he was absent when "all the city was moved" by the return of Naomi.

Moreover, the word rendered "kinsman" in verse 1 means, literally, "acquaintance"; and though the word "acquaintance" carried more to a Hebrew ear than it does to ours, it implies that Boaz was not a close kinsman of Naomi's husband: it signifies that, while not a near relative, Boaz was *known* to the family as belonging to it: they were acquainted with him as one of themselves. In brief, he was a kinsman, but a distant kinsman; and, before he interfered, he might well wait to see what the nearer kindred would do.

His Opportunity comes.

Now they did exactly nothing. The opportunity of showing mercy and doing kindness passed over therefore to Boaz. Nay, by a special act of Providence—so at least the Sacred Narrative implies—this opportunity was brought to his very door. Ruth goes gleaning, and, as a stranger to Bethlehem and its vicinity, she might of course have lit on the fields of an unfriendly owner. But "*her lot met her* in the field of Boaz"; *i.e.* she was guided to this field by the hand of Providence. Wandering at her will, going whithersoever she would, God was nevertheless with her and directed her steps.

Ruth in the field.

We may be sure that it was not without some hesitation that the modest and gentle Ruth offered

to glean after the reapers, and that it was not Ruth ii. 1.
without much reluctance that Naomi gave her consent. Then, as now, reapers might be vicious and rude. All through this Chapter we can see that Ruth ran great risk of deadly insult. Boaz strictly enjoins his young men not to "molest," or maltreat, her. Naomi is overjoyed that she need not go into any other field than that of Boaz, lest, among strangers, she should be insulted or injured.

We may be sure then, that the cupboard was bare, and that Naomi and Ruth were hard pinched by hunger, before either the one or the other could resolve that the risk should be run. And we must take it as a fresh instance of Ruth's love and fidelity that she would run even this risk rather than sit still while Naomi was in want.

VII

BOAZ THE COMPASSIONATE

Ruth ii. 2-13.

2. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

3. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

4. And, behold, Boaz came from Beth-lehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee.

5. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?

6. And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab:

7. And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried little in the house.

8. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:

9. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

10. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

Boaz the Compassionate

11. And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband : and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

12. The Lord recompence thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

13. Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord ; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.

2. *And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go into the fields, and glean among the ears after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.* 3. *And she went, and came and gleaned in a field after the reapers. And her lot met her in the field of Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.* 4. *And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee.* 5. *Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?* 6. *And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, She is a Moabitish damsel who came back with Naomi out of the Field of Moab ;* (7) *and she said, I pray thee let me glean, and I will gather after the reapers among the sheaves : so she came and hath continued* (at work) *even from the morning until now, save that she rested a little in the house.* 8. *Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens :* (9) *let thy eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou* (fearlessly) *after them : have I not charged the young men that they shall not molest thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels and drink of that which the young men have drawn.* 10. *Then she bent her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes that thou shouldst take note of me, seeing I am a stranger?* 11. *And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath been fully shewn me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband, and that thou hast left thy*

father and thy mother and the land of thy nativity, and art come among a people whom thou knewest not heretofore. 12. *The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to take refuge.* 13. *Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord, for thou hast comforted me, and hast spoken to the heart of thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thy handmaidens.*

VII

BOAZ THE COMPASSIONATE

Ruth ii. 2-13.

Ruth ii. 2-13. In the Harvest Field.

The Chapter gives us, incidentally, a graphic picture of an ancient harvest scene. The field is thick with waving barley. The reapers cut their way into it with sickles, grasping the ears till their arms are full. Behind them, the women gather up the armfuls and bind them into sheaves. Still farther in the rear follow the widow and the stranger, who, according to the Hebrew law, have a right to glean after the reapers. The overseer is busily urging on the reapers, and granting or refusing admission to the gleaners. Vessels filled, probably, with the rough local wine are at hand, that the heated and thirsty labourers may refresh themselves at need. The "house," with its barns, threshing-floors, and various out-buildings, stands in, or near, the field; and here the weary may rest when the heat and burden of the day prove too great for their strength. Here, too, under the shade of some spreading tree, men and women gather at meal-time, and are supplied with parched

Ruth ii. 2-13.

corn, and with bread, which they dip in a cool and strengthening mixture of vinegar and oil and water.

Boaz Arrives.

As the day advances, the master of the estate comes to see how the work goes on. With grave pious courtesy he salutes his "young men" with the words, "Jehovah be with you"; and they reply, "Jehovah bless thee" (verse 4).[1] He is quick to notice the presence of a stranger, and to inquire who she is and whence she comes. He is careful to shield her from insult and wrong, and to help her in her need. His tone to his young men is a fine blending of kindliness with authority; he shows himself even more careful for their good conduct than for their diligence in their work.

The Dangers of the Harvest-Field.

It is a charming scene: and one does not wonder that poets have sung of the beauty, purity, and simplicity of rural life. Nevertheless, one has only to go into country villages, and to wander in the fields where the reapers reap till the sun falls and all the land is dark, to discover that rural life is not so innocent and idyllic as it looks to the poet's eye; that it may be marred by at least as much ignorance, vice, and brutal coarseness of speech, manner, and habit, as the life of towns. And even as we gaze on *this* fair harvest scene, and listen to the pious greetings of

[1] A somewhat similar scene is suggested in Psalm cxxix. 7, 8.

master and men, we are again and again reminded of the cruel and deadly lusts which lurk under its fair exterior, and can only the more admire a man like Boaz and a woman like Ruth who move untainted through a scene by no means pure. Ruth ii. 2-13.

The very fact which would be likely to expose Ruth to the clownish jests and insults of the reapers, the fact that she was an alien, conspicuous perhaps by her foreign garb and ornaments, also drew upon her the attention of Boaz. Naturally, so soon as he sees her, he begins to ask of his overseer who she is and from whence she came (verse 5). The overseer's reply shows that he had caught some touch of his master's generous and considerate spirit. He tells Boaz that Ruth is the Moabitish damsel who had come back with Naomi to Bethlehem; that, ignorant perhaps of her legal right to glean in any Hebrew field, she had begged his permission to "gather after the reapers"; and he is forward to commend her diligence. She has been hard at work from morning till now, and had only once rested for a few moments in the shed, or "house," set apart for the weary (verses 6, 7). Boaz remarks Ruth.

Boaz, struck perhaps by the beauty of Ruth and the modesty of her demeanour, and knowing that she is of kin to him, multiplies marks of favour and kindness upon her. She is to remain —And protects her.

Ruth ii. 2-13.

on his estate, following the reapers from field to field, till the harvest is over. She need fear no rudeness or insult, for he has strictly charged the young men not to "molest," or offend, her. She is to drink freely from the vessels prepared for the reapers, although, as a gleaner, she could have no claim to share with them (verses 8, 9).

The gratitude of Ruth.

In her humility, Ruth, who had done so much for Naomi, and made so many sacrifices, expects no grace or help from others. Even the slight kindness of Boaz overwhelms her with gratitude. She flings herself at his feet and pours out her thanks for the kindly notice he has taken of an alien and a stranger (verse 10).

Boaz Explains.

And, as might have been expected, the generous heart of Boaz opens all the wider as he listens to her thanks, and learns how unassuming she is, how grateful even for the easy kindness he has shown her. He knows who she is, and what she has done. And the piety, as well as the generosity, of the man comes out in his reply. "You have left all," he says, "in your love for Naomi,—father, mother, and the land of your nativity. The Lord recompense you for this good deed. As you have come to take refuge under the wings of Israel's God, may He grant you a full reward (verses 11, 12). Obviously Boaz had the history of his great ancestor in his mind. Like Ruth,

Abraham had left all, and gone out into a strange country. And to him God had said, "*I* am thy great reward (Gen. xv. 1). May the blessing of faithful Abraham come on faithful Ruth—this is the wish and prayer of Boaz. He speaks, not as a Hebrew landowner to a Moabitish vagabond and beggar, but, rather, as a Hebrew judge and prophet,—as a prophet who knew that even the stranger who works righteousness and shows kindness is acceptable to God. Ruth ii. 2-13.

The blessing of Boaz fell on the heart of Ruth like showers on the mown grass. Hitherto she had known only sorrow and shame. No Israelite had recognised her, or helped her, or shown either any appreciation of her noble love for her mother, or any wish to welcome her to the faith and privilege of Israel. To all but Boaz she was simply "*the Moabitess*," — a stranger to the Covenant, an alien from the Commonwealth. But now the valiant soldier whom all Bethlehem praised, who sat as judge and teacher among his people, blesses her for her goodness, and assures her of the protection and goodwill of the God of Israel. "Thou hast comforted me," she gratefully replies; "thou hast spoken to my very heart, in thus blessing me, the alien, and in naming the Name of thy God upon me" (verse 13). The Stranger Cheered.

VIII

SIGNIFICANT KINDNESS

Ruth ii. 14-end.

14. And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.

15. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not.

16. And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

17. So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley.

18. And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed.

19. And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz.

20. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

21. And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.

22. And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is

good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.

23. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law.

14. *And Boaz said unto her at meal-time, Come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers; and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat and was satisfied, and left* (of that she ate). 15. *And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded the young men, saying, Let her glean even between the sheaves, and shame her not.* 16. *And pull out some* (ears) *from the armfuls on purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.* 17. *So she gleaned in the fields until evening, and beat out that she had gleaned; and it was about an ephah of barley.* 18. *And she took it up, and came into the city; and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. And she brought out and gave to her that which she had left* (at meal-time) *after she was satisfied.* 19. *And her mother-in-law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where hast thou worked? Blessed be he that did take note of thee. And she shewed her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, The man's name with whom I worked to-day is Boaz.* 20. *And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is akin to us, one of our* goelim. 21. *And Ruth the Moabitess said, Moreover he said unto me, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men until they have ended all my harvest.* 22. *And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter-in-law, Good, my daughter; go out only with his maidens, lest in any other field thou be molested.* 23. *So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, gleaning to the end of the barley-harvest and of the wheat-harvest; and then she abode with her mother-in-law.*

VIII

SIGNIFICANT KINDNESS

RUTH ii. 14-end.

Ruth ii. 14-end.
The strong Man and the gentle Woman.

RUTH utters no reproach against the men of Bethlehem for leaving her in her unprovided loneliness and need; but the very passion of her gratitude for his friendly recognition must have made Boaz aware of the utter isolation in which she had lived, of the unsympathetic and suspicious element through which she had sadly moved. And his heart warms to her more and more. Here are a virtue, a tenderness, a fidelity, such as he had not found, no, not in Israel; and yet no man seems conscious of it: it meets with no appreciation, enlists no sympathy, wins no response. The noble love noble deeds, and those who do them; and, probably, this brave soldier felt that even his courage was as nothing to that of the gentle woman who stood before him. He, therefore, will help her all he can. As she has come to glean in his fields, he will take care that her gleanings be ample, and that her wants be satisfied.

Significant Kindness

Ruth ii. 14-end. The Care of Boaz.

As the reapers gather for their meal, Boaz bids Ruth sit with them. Knowing that they will take their tone from him, he himself hands her the parched corn. When the meal is over, he bids her, instead of following the reapers afar off, glean among the sheaves,—nay, bids the reapers pull out a few ears from those they gather in their arms and let them fall where she will find them. Above all, he charges them not to "shame" her, not to jest or romp in their rude country fashion so as to put her to the blush (verses 15, 16). In many a harvest field a woman, and especially a comely woman, to whom such extraordinary favour was shown by the "master," would only too surely become a mark for evil tongues. And we can, therefore, well understand why Boaz, who showed his true courtesy by resolving to help Ruth in her own way, laid so stringent a rein on the young men's lips. Happily, too, the overseer was her friend, or, despite the strict injunction of Boaz, Ruth might have suffered much and deeply from the men who cut the barley and the women who bound it into sheaves.

The Industry of Ruth.

Amid this shower of favours Ruth did not cease to be herself. When Boaz hands her an abundance of parched corn, she eats till she is satisfied—so generous is the supply; but she

Ruth ii. 14-end.

thinks of Naomi's hunger as she satisfies her own, and lays aside a portion of the food (verse 14). Nor does she stint her labour because, by the kindness of Boaz, it is now more productive. She works on till evening, and works to such good purpose that, when she beats out her gleanings, she has upwards of fifty pounds of barley to carry home (verse 17).

Naomi's Surprise and Joy.

When Naomi sees how much Ruth has gleaned she is amazed, and cries, "Where hast thou been? In whose field canst thou have gleaned?" (verse 19). But here once more we are made to feel that we are with those in whom piety is an active and ruling power. Any woman, however selfish or godless, might have been as surprised and glad as Naomi was at this unexpected turn of fortune. But she, before even her question can be answered, and moved simply by the manifest happiness of Ruth in the abundance of her gleanings, "blesses" the man who has given her this happiness. For *this* she does not need to know who he is. Whoever had been kind and bountiful to Ruth must have meant to show that he appreciated her virtues and felt for her misfortunes. And therefore Naomi exclaims, "Blessed be he, whoever he may be, who has taken friendly note of thee" (verse 19). It had been hard for her to send Ruth out to such work.

The man who had treated her beloved daughter so kindly that she came home loaded with a weight of barley, and bright and happy in the issue of her toils, has done a good deed, for which she invokes on him the benediction of God. Ruth ii. 14-end.

When the blessing has been pronounced, Ruth tells the story of the day, and names Boaz as the man who has befriended her. She, apparently, did not know how much the sound of this name would convey to Naomi's ears. Probably she knew nothing either of the kinsmen of Elimelech or of the obligations which kinship imposed among the Hebrews. But Naomi sees the full significance of her kinsman's kindness at a glance, and breaks into a transport of religious gratitude. She explains, "The man is akin to us, one of our *goelim*" (a term the significance of which I reserve till we reach another Chapter), and pours forth a song of praise: "Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off His kindness to the living and to the dead" (verse 20). Ruth Explains. Boaz Identified.

If we would enter into the force of this outburst of praise, we must remember that Naomi had lost her faith—not in God, indeed, but in the goodwill of God for her. She had thought that He was turned to be her foe, and the foe of the husband and sons who had been snatched from her by a premature death. They were dead because Naomi's Despair.

Ruth ii. 14-end.

they had sinned in forsaking the land of the Covenant. She was bereaved, forsaken, "empty," because she had shared their sin.

—Now Dispersed.

So, at least, she had conceived. But now, in the wonderful Providence which had led Ruth to find a friend in her valiant and wealthy kinsman, she descries a proof that God had not wholly abandoned her, that He had not left off His kindness whether to her or to the beloved dead. No one who has witnessed such a revulsion from spiritual despair to renewed hope in the Divine goodness and compassion will marvel at the ecstasy which breathes in Naomi's words. Rather, he will be sure that it would be long before she could recover her composure, and listen to what Ruth had still to tell; he will feel that in this brief exclamation of praise we have, compressed into a single sentence, the substance of many heartfelt thanksgivings.

Our kindness and the kindness of God.

When we consider how potent our kindness may be in quickening the sense of God's kindness and compassion in a neighbour's heart, and how potent, therefore, our lack of kindness and compassion may be, in inducing or confirming a neighbour's despair, we may well tremble at the responsibility which, at any moment, may fall upon us. It was not till Naomi arrived in Bethlehem, and saw her neighbours indifferent

and apathetic, however curious and inquisitive they were, that she concluded herself to be shut out from the mercy of God. It was only when Boaz showed a little kindness to her daughter—such a kindness as we may show a neighbour any day—that she felt the door of mercy was once more thrown open to her. Let us, then, be kindly affectioned one to another. We may not be able to do much,—Boaz did but give a few handfuls of barley and speak a few considerate words,—and yet what we do may suffice to lift the weight from some heavily burdened heart. Our kindness may make way for the kindness of God. Our little may help Him to do much.

Ruth ii. 14-end.

IX

RUTH'S *MENUCHAH*

Ruth iii. 1.

Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?

Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek an asylum for thee, that it may be well with thee?

IX

RUTH'S *MENUCHAH*

Ruth iii. 1.

Ruth iii. 1.

The Story and its Period.

It is somewhat difficult to handle the main incident of this Chapter. Not, indeed, that there is any, even the faintest, touch of impurity in the story itself. If, as we read it, we think of Ruth as guilty of an immodest boldness, or of Boaz as in any way lacking in manly honour and virtue, that can only be because we judge these ancient worthies by the standard of modern conventions, or because we ourselves are wanting in true delicacy and refinement. If we would do them justice, it is above all things requisite that we should carry our thoughts back through more than thirty centuries, and bear in mind the patriarchal simplicity of the manners and customs of that antique world in which they lived.

The Story and Contemporary Custom.

An age in which the wealthy owner of a large and fertile estate would himself winnow barley, and would sleep among the heaps of winnowed corn in an open threshing-floor (verse 7), is, obviously, an age as different from this as it is

Ruth iii. 1.

remote from it. Moreover Ruth, in creeping softly to the resting-place of Boaz and nestling under the corner of his long robe (verse 7), was simply making a legal claim in the approved manner of the time.

A Hazardous Custom.

The custom was hazardous. We are told that the heart of Boaz was "cheerful" with food and wine when Ruth came to him—to indicate both the risk she ran and the virtue of the man who was able to master alike inclination and opportunity, even when they combined their forces in a single moment of temptation, rather than betray the confidence reposed in him. The very words which Boaz addressed to Ruth are reported, moreover, that we may catch their simple piety, the fatherly tenderness of the tone in which he spake to his "daughter," the pure devotion with which he invoked on her the blessing of God (verse 10); and, so reading, may be saved from any misconception whether of her conduct or of his.

Two important words—*Menuchah* and *Goel*.

There are but two words in the Chapter which call for detailed explanation; and in explaining these perhaps all may be said that the reader needs to enable him to peruse this section of the story with an intelligent apprehension of its meaning. In the Hebrew these two words are *menuchah* and *goel*. *Menuchah* means "rest," or, rather,

"a place, or asylum, of rest"; and *goel* means "kinsman," or "redeemer" or "avenger," according to the connection in which it is found.

Let us take the word *Menuchah* first. Naomi said to Ruth (verse 1), "My daughter, shall I not seek *a place* [or *an asylum*] *of rest* for thee, that it may be well with thee?" What she meant by that question we learn from other passages of Holy Writ. For, in Old Testament Scriptures, the word *menuchah* is used to designate the asylum of honour, freedom, and peace which the Hebrew woman found in the house of her husband. *Menuchah.*—Woman's Asylum.

The position of an unmarried woman in the ancient Oriental world was, as I have already remarked, both a perilous and an unhappy one, so unhappy that, in some Oriental tribes, the birth of a girl brought no joy with it, but grief and lamentation. Even among the Hebrews the daughters counted for little; it was the sons, who could work for them and fight for them, in whom the family and the nation rejoiced. Only in the house of a husband was a woman sure of safety, respect, honour. And hence the Hebrews spake of the husband's home as the woman's *menuchah*, or place of rest, her secure and happy asylum from servitude, neglect, and license.

Ruth iii. 1.—The Nation's Asylum.

In like manner they regarded a secure and hereditary possession of land as the *menuchah*, or rest, of a nation. Thus Moses said to the children of Israel, when they wandered in the Wilderness, "Ye have not yet come unto *the rest* [*menuchah*] which the Lord your God giveth you" (Deut. xii. 9): by which he meant that they had no secure asylum of repose and freedom, no settled and well-defended inheritance, in the Desert; *that* was not their rest, but only the way to their rest. King Solomon was the first Hebrew chieftain who could bless God for the gift of a complete "rest" to his people. But as, in his reign, every man sat under his own vine and under his own fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid, he could thankfully acknowledge that the whole land had, at last, become the secure and tranquil inheritance of the Hebrew race. And hence, at the opening of the Temple, in his sublime dedicatory prayer, he said: "Blessed be the Lord who hath given *a rest* [*menuchah*] unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised" (1 Kings viii. 56).

The True *Menuchah*.

The Prophets rose to a still higher conception and use of the word. For them, God Himself, God alone, was the true rest, or *menuchah*, of men. And hence they predicted that when God came, in the person of the Messiah, the golden

days of Paradise would return, and the whole world would enter into its true *menuchah*, its final and glorious "rest." When the Messiah came, when Christ dwelt among men, He invited the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him, on the express ground that He was their *rest*; that in and with Him they would find such an asylum of freedom and honourable repose as the Hebrew wife found in her husband's home; such a rest as the Hebrew race found in the promised land when it was wholly their own; nay, such a rest as the Prophets had taught them to look and hope for only in God.[1] Ruth iii. 1.

This is the history of the word which Naomi uses in verse 1. When, on her way home from the Field of Moab, she was fain to bid her daughters-in-law farewell, she had prayed that, in return for their kindness to the dead and to her, "the Lord would grant them each to find *an asylum* in the house of" a new husband (i. 9). When, despite her entreaties and commands, they refused to leave her, she had had the hard task of warning them that no such asylum of rest would be open to them in the land of Israel; that, if they *would* go with her, they must give up all the hopes which women hold most dear, since the Hebrew law forbade the men of Israel

The Asylum that seemed denied.

[1] See Chapter xiii. on "Christ the Menuchah of the World."

Ruth iii. 1.

to marry the daughters of Moab (i. 11-13). The prospect was too dark for Orpah's love to encounter; but Ruth clave unto Naomi, despite the darkness of her future lot.

The Asylum of which there is prospect.

And, now, Naomi sees that the time is come in which the fidelity of Ruth may receive a reward beyond the reach of hope. Ruth is known "in all the Gate," *i.e.* in all the city, of Bethlehem as "a good and brave woman" (iii. 11), a woman distinguished by an heroic love and virtue. She has been recognised and blessed by Boaz himself as an Israelite indeed, as having "come to take shelter under the wings of the Lord God of Israel" (ii. 12). So that now Naomi sets herself, with courage and hope, to find a *menuchah*, an asylum of rest and honour, for the daughter who had clung to her with a love so rare.

The hesitation of Boaz.

Naomi knew, or suspected, perhaps, that Boaz looked with kindness, with respect and admiration, on Ruth. Perhaps, too, she was aware of the two considerations which held him back from seeking a wife in Ruth. These considerations were, as we learn from this Chapter, first, that there was a nearer kinsman than himself, who had a prior legal claim on Ruth; and, secondly, that he was very much older than Ruth, and hesitated to place himself in the way of a more suitable and equal match (iii. 13). The tone in which he

addresses Ruth,—"my daughter,"—and the fact that he had observed she did not respond to the advances of any of the "young men, whether poor or rich," indicate that he was many years her senior, and had waited to see whether she would not select some man younger than himself before he offered her a *menuchah*, or resting-place, in his house (iii. 10). Ruth iii. 1.

It was, I suppose, this hesitation on the part of Boaz, and perhaps some glimpse of the generous and kindly motive that prompted it, which induced Naomi to resort to a decisive and somewhat dangerous expedient, although an expedient fully warranted by the law and custom of the time. —And Naomi's Expedient.

X

RUTH'S GOEL

Ruth iii. 2-end.

2. And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor.

3. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking.

4. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.

5. And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.

6. And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her.

7. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.

8. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.

9. And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

10. And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.

11. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all

that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

12. And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.

13. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth: lie down until the morning.

14. And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor.

15. Also he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city.

16. And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her.

17. And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law.

18. Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.

2. *And, now, is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold he winnoweth barley to-night in the threshing-floor.* 3. *Wash thyself, therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy* (best) *apparel upon thee, and get thee down to the floor, but let not thyself be seen until the man have done eating and drinking.* 4. *And it shall be that when he lieth down, thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in and uncover* (the place at) *his feet, and lay thee down: and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.* 5. *And she said unto her, All that thou sayest I will do.* 6. *And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law bade her.* 7. *And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn; and she came softly and uncovered* (the place at) *his feet, and laid her down.* 8. *And it came to pass, at midnight, that the man was startled, and bent himself forward; and, behold, a woman*

lay at his feet. 9. *And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth, thine handmaid: spread therefore thy wings over thine handmaid: for thou art a* goel. 10. *And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thy latter kindness is better than thy former, inasmuch as thou didst not go after young men, whether poor or rich.* 11. *And, now, my daughter, fear not; I will do for thee all that thou askest: for all the gate of my people doth know that thou art a brave woman.* 12. *And, now, truly indeed I am a* goel; *howbeit there is a* goel *nearer than I.* 13. *Tarry here to-night, and it shall be, in the morning, that if he will redeem thee, well; let him redeem: but if he will not redeem thee, then, as the Lord liveth, I will redeem thee. Lie down until the morning.* 14. *And she lay at his feet till the morning: and she rose up before a man could recognise his friend. For he said, Let it not be known that the woman came into the floor.* 15. *Also he said, Bring hither thy shawl that thou hast upon thee, and hold it out. And when she held it out, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her. And he went into the city.* 16. *And when she came to her mother-in-law, she* (Naomi) *said, How comest thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done unto her.* 17. *And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty to thy mother-in-law.* 18. *And she* (Naomi) *said, Stay at home, my daughter, until thou knowest how the matter will go; for the man will not rest until he have finished it this day.*

X

RUTH'S GOEL

RUTH iii. 2-end.

WHAT the legal claim which stood in the way of Boaz was, and how the expedient of Naomi drove him to take immediate action, we shall better understand when we have looked at the second of the two notable words of this Chapter. Ruth iii. 2-end.

This word is *Goel*. Like the word *menuchah*, it has a history, and a history that runs on and up into the Hebrew conception of the Messiah. According to its derivation, *goel* means "*one who unlooses*"—unlooses that which has been bound, and restores it to its original position. The *goel* did his duty, for example, if he redeemed a promissory note by paying it and handing it back to the man who had given it; or if he redeemed a piece of land by paying off the liens upon it and restoring it to its original owner; or if he redeemed a captive by paying his ransom and setting him free. So that the fundamental idea of a *goel* was that of a man who *redeemed*, or set loose, that which had in any way been bound. Goel: the Man who Redeemed.

Ruth iii. 2-end.

The *Goel* and the Childless Widow.

This general conception was specialised in two different ways. (1) In virtue of an ancient custom in Israel, a custom sanctioned by the law of Moses, when a man died without issue, his brother, or, if he had no brother, his nearest kinsman, was bound to marry his widow. This singular custom was based on a fine principle. Whatever the defects of their political economy, the ancient Hebrews firmly grasped a conviction which it were well that our modern statesmen held and acted on far more stedfastly than they do. They heartily believed that the true strength, wealth, and glory of a nation lay, not in the breadth of its possessions, nor in the victorious conduct of its wars, nor in the fortunes amassed by its citizens, but in its *men*, and in their manliness and virtue. And hence they would not lose a single man, if they could help it; and, above all, they would not suffer a single family to become extinct: for they knew that it is the families of a land, holding the ground held by their ancestors for many generations and trained in the habits of their pious fathers, which are the very heart and substance of the national life.

The Principle involved.

The Duty of the *Goel*.

Among the many laws by which the Hebrew legislators sought to preserve their families from extinction was this law of the *goelim*, the law which made it incumbent on the nearest kinsman

to take a childless widow to wife, and ordained that any son born of this marriage should inherit the name and possessions of the first husband. This kinsman was called the *goel*, because, "by raising up seed to his brother," he *redeemed* his brother's name and inheritance from being blotted out.

Ruth iii. 2-end.

It is easy to understand how in process of time this title came to be applied both to Jehovah and to the Lord Jesus. Jehovah was the *Redeemer* of Israel; for, again and again, He interposed to save them from captivity, or to ransom them when they had been carried away captive, and to preserve them a name and a place in the earth. The Lord Jesus is the *Redeemer* of the whole world; for when we were captive to divers lusts and groaning under the oppressions of Evil, the Son of Man proved Himself our true kinsman by paying a ransom for us and setting us free from our intolerable bonds.[1]

The Lord Jesus as the Goel of the World.

(2) It is easy, moreover, to understand how the kinsman who redeemed had a dark and miserable counterpart in the kinsman who avenged. For the very man who was bound by the ties of kinship to keep his brother's name alive, was also bound by the self-same ties to avenge his brother if he were slain or wronged.

Goel: the Avenger of Blood.

[1] See, for a fuller treatment, Chapter xiv.

Ruth iii. 2-end.

Thus it came to pass that in the Bible the word "*goel*" is used both for the kinsman-redeemer and the kinsman-avenger, or "the avenger of blood."

Boaz a Goel of Naomi and Ruth.

These, then, are the two special meanings of the word *goel*: it means "one who redeems"; it also means "one who avenges." But it is only in the first and happier of these two senses that it is used in the Book of Ruth. Boaz was among the *goelim* of Naomi and Ruth. He was not THE *goel*, for there was a nearer kinsman than he; but he was A *goel*, and if this nearer kinsman should refuse to do his duty, then Boaz might step in and do it for him.

How the Case stood.

Mark, then, how the case stands. On the one side we have the two noble women, Naomi and Ruth, both widows and both childless; on the other side we have the two men, Boaz and the unnamed kinsman, the latter of whom is bound, according to the Hebrew law, to take Naomi, or, if she should refuse, to take Ruth to wife, in order that the family of Elimelech may not perish out of the land. Of the women, Naomi has the first claim. How is she to show that she waives her legal claim in favour of Ruth? Of the men, the unnamed kinsman has the first right to redeem. How is Naomi to indicate that she would prefer Boaz to this

nearer kinsman? She achieves both points at a stroke by sending *Ruth* to make the claim instead of making it herself, and by sending her to make it of *Boaz* instead of the nearer kinsman. By sending Ruth instead of going herself, she showed that she waived her own prior claim; and by sending her to Boaz, she showed that she wished Boaz, rather than the next of kin, to play the part of *goel*. Ruth iii. 2-end.

This is, I believe, the true secret motive and reason of Ruth's hazardous adventure in the threshing-floor of Boaz. Happily, the adventure, hazardous as it was, ran to a happy close. Ruth puts off her widow's weeds, arrays herself in holiday attire, to show that the days of her mourning are past (verses 3-6). She creeps, unseen, to the feet of Boaz, makes her claim in the usual form, thus constraining him to see her righted or himself to be put to shame. The Reason for Ruth's Adventure.

Boaz is willing to have the duty of the *goel* thrust upon him. He says to her, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter, *for thy latter kindness is better than thy former, inasmuch as thou didst not go after the young men, whether poor or rich*" (verse 10). By which he meant, I suppose, that Ruth had shown even a nobler fidelity and love in claiming his services as *goel* than in leaving her native land to follow and The Attitude of Boaz.

Ruth iii. 2-end.

comfort Naomi. Had she been set on her own pleasure or advancement, with her strange foreign beauty she might easily, it would seem, have won to herself any of the young unmarried men of Bethlehem, and have gained a suitable and wealthy mate. But, on Naomi's bidding, she had carefully observed the law of Israel, the law which bade her, as a childless widow, claim alliance with her husband's kinsman. And in thus sacrificing the natural preference of a young and attractive woman, she had shown even a finer kindness to Naomi and her family, and a nobler devotion to the law and God of the Hebrews, than in leaving Moab for Bethlehem.

The Pledge of Boaz.

But Boaz does not simply laud her fidelity and piety. He promises, he swears, that, should the nearer kinsman refuse the duty and honour, he himself will redeem her dead husband's name and inheritance. Probably Boaz found it hard to utter the words, "There is a nearer *goel* than I" (verse 12); for, obviously, by this time, as his allusion to "the young men" indicates, he was deeply attached to his fair young kinswoman. And it illustrates the nobility of his character, his honour and integrity, that he should propose to give this "nearer kinsman" his legal due, although to give it might cost him no small sacrifice. We may be sure, I think, that there was a good deal of quiet

heroism in the words of Boaz: "Truly I am a *goel*; but there is a nearer *goel* than I. Tarry here to-night, and it shall be in the morning that if he will redeem thee, well; let him redeem: but if he will not redeem thee, then, as the Lord liveth, I will redeem thee" (verse 13). Ruth iii. 2-end.

In the morning, at break of day, before there was light enough for "a man to recognise his friend" (verse 14), they "rose up," that Ruth might be home before anyone was stirring, lest any breath of suspicion should blow on the woman whom all the city pronounced to be as good as she was brave. Still further to divert suspicion, Boaz bids Ruth take off her shawl and hold it out while he pours barley into it. When it is full, he lifts the load on to her head, and Ruth goes homeward, bearing her burden with a joyful heart. And now, should any early neighbour meet her, he will but think that she has been to fetch away her gleanings from the field of Boaz: he will only see what he has often seen before, a woman stepping lightly along beneath a load of grain (verse 15). The Appeal Complete.

But so much stress is laid (verses 15 and 17) on the number of measures which Boaz gave Ruth, —*six* (verse 15) and Ruth is so expressly told to take them to her mother-in-law, and numbers are so significantly used in the Bible, that we can The Import of the Six Measures.

Ruth iii. 2-end.

hardly doubt that this emphasised *six* has a symbolical meaning which Naomi would be quick to read. If there were any such meaning in it, as probably to Hebrews there would be, it would be this: "The number *six* is the symbol of labour and service, and is followed by *seven*, the symbol of rest: for did not God make the heavens and the earth in six days, and rest from His labours on the seventh day? Was not the land of Israel diligently tilled for six years, and was not the seventh a sabbatical year, or year of rest?" Naomi, then, would probably find in the *six* measures of barley a hint that Ruth's term of labour and service had come to an end, and that she was about to find, what Naomi had desired for her, a *rest* (*menuchah*) in the house of a husband.

—Recognised by Naomi.

Naomi seems to have read the symbol thus; for, in the last verse of the Chapter, she bids Ruth "stay at home," as the Hebrew bride had to do until her affianced husband came to fetch her. In past years, when Elimelech and Boaz were friends and companions as well as kinsmen, Naomi had learned enough of the character of Boaz to be sure that he would not "let the grass grow under his feet," that he "would not rest" till he had finished the matter of Ruth's redemption and found her a "rest."

XI

THE LAW OF THE *GOELIM*

Ruth iv. 1-8.

1. Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down.

2. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.

3. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's:

4. And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.

5. Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

6. And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.

7. Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel.

8. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.

1. *And Boaz went up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the* goel *of whom Boaz spake passed by; unto whom*

he said, Ho, So-and-So, turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. 2. *And he* (Boaz) *took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.* 3. *And he said unto the* goel, *Naomi, who is come again out of the Field of Moab, hath put up for sale the parcel of land which was our brother Elimelech's;* (4) *and I determined to advertise thee of it, and say, Acquire it before those who sit* (in the gate) *and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it; but if thou wilt not redeem it, tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it but thou, and I, who am next to thee. And he said, I will redeem it.* 5. *Then said Boaz, What day thou acquirest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou acquirest it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.* 6. *And the* goel *said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance; redeem thou for thyself that which it is mine to redeem, for I cannot redeem it.* 7. *Now this was the custom formerly in Israel in cases of redeeming and in cases of exchanging, in order that at all points they might be confirmed: A man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbour: and this was attestation in Israel.* 8. *When, then, the* goel *said unto Boaz, Do thou acquire it, he drew off his shoe.*

XI

THE LAW OF THE *GOELIM*

RUTH iv. 1-8.

Ruth iv. 1-8.

Uses of the Gates in Ancient Cities.

THE gates of ancient cities played many parts: they were guard-houses; they were markets; they were courts of justice; they were places for public deliberation and audience. Necessarily, therefore, they were massively built, with recessed chambers, or divans, in the sides, and often with chambers also above the arch. Here the inhabitants of the city were wont to assemble, either for the transaction of business or to hear and tell the news. Here the judges sat, and administered justice to all comers. Here even kings came to give audience to other kings, or to their ambassadors. So that the Gate played a great part, not only in the defence, but also in the public economy, of the city.

Some Modern Parallels.

Some faint resemblance to these ancient Gates may be found in the structures called "Bars," in some English cities, though these modern gates are much smaller than their ancient prototypes; and some faint reminiscence of their character as seats

Ruth iv. 1-8.

of judicial and royal authority in the titles Sublime *Porte*, or the Ottoman *Porte*—*porte* meaning *gate*,—by which the Government of Turkey is still designated.

At the Gate of Bethlehem.

The scene of Chapter IV. is the Gate of Bethlehem. We have already followed Boaz to the harvest-field and the threshing-floor; we have found in his bearing many illustrations of the simple and primitive customs of the antique time in which he lived. And as we now study Chapter IV.—a veritable cabinet of antiquities—and follow him to the Gate, and mark how he prosecutes a legal suit, we shall once more be impressed by the simplicity of the ancient Hebrew manners, a simplicity, however, quite compatible with a certain dignified and stately formality.

The Law of the *Goelim*.

As we are to "assist" at a legal suit, it will be well for us to acquaint ourselves, at the very outset, with the law to which an appeal is to be made. This law is the law of the *Goelim*—the law which governs all acts of exchange and redemption. So far as we are at present concerned with it, this law demanded that the nearest kinsman of a childless widow should marry her, even though he himself were already married: and that the eldest son born of this marriage should, in due time, enter on the inheritance and perpetuate the name of his mother's *first* husband.

Ruth iv. 1-8. The Inwardness of the Ordinance.

This singular, and, if judged by modern standards, immoral, law of Levirate marriage, like other of the laws of Moses—*e.g.* the law of divorce—which have been called in question, was a concession to "the hardness of their hearts" for whom he legislated; and, so far from being a license to immorality, it was really a limitation of the current immoralities of the time. In ages long anterior to his, a wife, being *bought* from her parents, became the property of her husband, and too valuable a property to be given up at his death. With other property she descended to his heirs, commonly his brothers, any one of whom might possess her, in some tribes going even to the shameful excess of all possessing her in common. Michaelis, in his *Commentaries on the Laws of Moses* (Book III. Chap. V. Art. 98), has well brought out the process and advance by which this hateful custom grew into a legalised system of Levirate marriages.

This system obtained among the Canaanitish tribes for centuries before the time of Moses, as is proved by the shocking story recorded in Genesis xxxviii. All that the great legislator of the Hebrews is responsible for is, that he set still straiter limits to the prevailing custom, including among the duties of the Goel that he, and he only, should "raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name

Ruth iv. 1-8.

of the dead might not be cut off from among his brethren."

How the Law was put into Practice.

The law was designed to prevent the extinction of any Hebrew family and the alienation of any family estate. All male blood-relations of the deceased man were reckoned as among his *goelim*, or redeemers; but the nearest of all was THE *goel*, and was the first who was bound to redeem his kinsman's name and inheritance. If, however, he refused to redeem, then the next kinsman succeeded to his right and duty; but he himself, for his refusal, was put to an open shame.

The Letter of the Law.

But let us have the very statute itself before us. It is recorded in Deut. xxv. 5-10, and runs thus:—

If kinsmen dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry outside [*i.e.* outside the family circle], *unto a stranger; her husband's kinsman shall go in unto her, and take her to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's kinsman unto her. And it shall be that the first-born whom she beareth shall stand upon the name* [*i.e.* take the place, or arise in the place] *of the kinsman who is dead, that his name be not wiped out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his kinsman's wife, then let his kinsman's wife go up to the gate, unto the elders, and say, My husband's kinsman refuseth to raise up*

unto his kinsman a name in Israel; he will not Ruth iv. 1-8.
do the duty of my husband's kinsman. Then the elders of the city shall call him, and speak unto him; and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; then shall his kinsman's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face,[1] *and*

[1] Michaelis will not hear of such a rendering of the Mosaic statute. He admits, indeed, that the Hebrew of Deuteronomy xxv. 9 may signify that the wronged and slighted widow had a right to spit in the kinsman's face. "But, then," he argues, "that act in a public court is so indecent, that if any other interpretation is admissible, this one ought not to be adopted. Now there are two others. (1) *She shall spit before his face.* The Arabs, at this day, when they wish to affront anyone, spit and cry *Fi*; even people of rank do so, just as the common people do with us." And no one who remembers how terribly, during the Civil War in America, the ladies of Baltimore and other Southern cities punished the Northern soldiers by simply spitting as often as they passed them in the streets, will doubt that even this rendering of the phrase describes what might be regarded as a sufficiently cruel indignity. Accordingly, I see that Dr. Benisch, in his Jewish School and Family Bible, renders the phrase, "and spit *before* his face." Michaelis, however, finds, and prefers, a second admissible interpretation of it. He argues (2) that the Hebrew verb may mean *to revile, bilem evomere,* and judges the phrase to mean that the slighted widow had a right to revile the kinsman in court as much as she pleased. With unusual humour and liveliness, this learned commentator proceeds to remark that the punishment prescribed by the Mosaic law was, after all, not so very severe, since most men would rather have it known that they had refused a woman than that they themselves had been refused; and adds: "To be once in his lifetime solemnly abused in a public court by a woman is, at any rate, much easier to be borne than the same treatment

Ruth iv. 1-8.

shall answer and say, So let it be done unto the man who will not build up his kinsman's house. And his name shall be called in Israel, House of the Shoe taken off [*i.e.* anyone might call him "Baresole," without committing a legal offence; his family would be stigmatised as the family of a shoeless or barefooted vagabond,—*shoeless* "fellow" being equivalent to "*miserable* fellow," since it was only in extreme penury and misery that the Hebrews went barefoot].

The Symbolic Act.

This is the statute to which Boaz is about to appeal; and the one provision of it which still calls for explanation is that symbolic act, the taking off of the shoe. The custom was even thus early a very ancient one, as we are reminded in this Chapter (verse 7), and was observed in all cases of redemption and exchange; in fact, it was

from a man, or extra-judicially; and if, besides, the cause is known, and that the court allows her this liberty, in order to give free vent to her passion, because the man will not marry her according to her wish, the more violent the emotions of her rage are, the more flattering to him must they prove; and he will go out of court with more pride than if she had excused him from marrying her with much coolness, or without any emotion at all." All this, however, evidently savours too much of modern times and modes of thought. The plainest and most obvious meaning of the Hebrew phrase is that of our Authorised Version; and if we remember the simplicity and directness of ancient customs, and that much which we now esteem delicate and becoming is an outgrowth of modern civilisation and refinement, we shall not scruple to read it, "and she shall spit *in* his face."

the legal form for confirming or binding legal or commercial transactions. And this custom had its origin in the fact that when a man took possession of landed property, he did it by planting his shoe on the soil: he asserted his right to it by treading on the land he had bought. Thus the shoe symbolised a possession or an estate which a man actually held, and which he could tread with his feet at will. Naturally and easily, therefore, the taking off of the shoe and offering it to another came to signify that a man renounced his own legal claim to a possession and transferred it to the neighbour to whom he gave his shoe: with the shoe he gave the right to tread and till the land.

Ruth iv. 1-8.

This singular custom was not peculiar to the Jews; it also obtained anciently among the Germans. But among the Hebrews of the earlier times it grew into common use as a symbol of exchange, and was employed as a sign of the transfer of rights of any kind, and not only to denote the transfer of land: in short, it seems to have been as common as signing a deed or handing over a warrant is with us. And if we bear this fact in mind, we often get a new light on even the most familiar passages. Thus, for example, the Prodigal Son, in our Lord's parable, has shoes put on his feet, to denote

A wide-spread Symbol.

Ruth iv. 1-8.

that he is reinstated in the inheritance he had left.

The Public Slight.

Of course a custom so common was not of itself ignominious. But to the Hebrew there was as wide a difference between taking off his own shoe and having it taken off by another, as there is with us between lifting off one's own hat and having it knocked off by another. And in the case of the kinsman who refused to do a *goel's* duty by his brother's widow, the shoe was *taken off*, before the Elders, by the woman whom he had refused to marry. He was thus publicly and ceremoniously branded as one who had broken the law, as having failed in the sacred and imperative duties of kinship, as having preferred his private interests and aims to the welfare of the Commonwealth. And this public disgrace was enhanced by the indignity of being spat upon by the woman he had wronged, and having his whole family saddled with the nickname, "House of the Shoeless," or "Baresole's Kin"—which exposed them to general ridicule and contempt.

XII

THE LAW INVOKED

Ruth iv. 9-end.

9. And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

10. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.

11. And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Beth-lehem:

12. And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman.

13. So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son.

14. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

15. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

16. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

17. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying,

There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

18. Now these are the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron,

19. And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab,

20. And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon,

21. And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed,

22. And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.

9. *And Boaz said unto the elders and all the people, Ye are witnesses this day that I have acquired all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.* 10. *Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I acquired to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his place. Ye are witnesses this day.* 11. *And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that cometh into thy house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and mayest thou grow strong in Ephrathah and win a name in Bethlehem:* (12) *and may thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bore unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman.*

13. *So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and he went in unto her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son.* 14. *And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, who hath not left thee this day without a* goel, *and may his name be famous in Israel:* (15) *and may he be a restorer of thy soul, and the stay of thine old age; for thy daughter-in-law, who loveth thee, who is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him.* 16. *And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.* 17. *And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.*

18. *Now these are the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron,* (19) *and Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab,* (20) *and Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon,* (21) *and Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed,* (22) *and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.*

XI

THE LAW INVOKED

RUTH iv. 9-end.

Ruth iv. 9-end.

How Boaz enforced the Law.

THE law of the *Goelim* was not enforced by Boaz in all its severity. But, in order to make his own marriage with Ruth lawful and legal, he was obliged to appeal to it, and, in part, to put it in force. His mode of action shows how primitive the time was, how simple the social organisation. Obviously there was as yet no king in Israel, no accessible judge even, before whom he might carry his suit. And so, very early in the morning, Boaz hurries from the threshing-floor that he may seat himself in the Gate in time to catch those who, like himself, had slept outside the walls, and will be returning into the city, and those who may leave the city for the fields. He has not long taken his seat before the *goel*, the unnamed kinsman, passes by. Boaz calls on him to sit down,—using a legal form of summons from which his kinsman would understand that he had some legal business to transact with him.

Ruth iv. 9-end.

The Summons to the Unnamed Kinsman.

We translate the summons, "*Ho, So-and-so,*" or, "*Ho, Such-an-one,* turn aside, sit down here" (verse 1). But it is difficult, if not impossible, so to translate the Hebrew form as to convey its full significance. In the original we have two Hebrew words, *Peloni Almoni,* and these two words, apparently, embody one of those legal obliquities of which most ancient systems of law retain some trace. Examples may be found in those fictitious personages, John Doe and Richard Roe, of the English action for ejectment, who have only recently been abolished; and in the custom which, till a few years since, obtained in the German courts of suing, not in one's own proper name, but in some common and familiar name, such as *Hans.*

The Form Employed.

The ancient Hebrew form of procedure was of this oblique kind. Instead of summoning even his near kinsman by his personal name, Boaz cried, "*Peloni Almoni,* turn aside, and sit down," —the words meaning literally "*such*" and "*nameless*"; the effect of using this antique form being, so far as we can now recover it, very much as if he had summoned an anonymous person before the Elders instead of giving him his proper name; just as a few years ago certain fictitious personages, John Doe and Richard Roe, might have been, and were, summoned into an English court.

What the origin of the form was, whether it denoted that only a *friendly* suit was to be tried, or whether it was intended to cover errors of misdescription, or whether it grew out of the solemn Eastern courtesy which would shrink from naming a man when threatening him with vexation or harm, it is impossible to say: but, in any case, we have here, in this phrase, an old legal fossil, a remnant of a still more ancient legal form in one of the most ancient systems of jurisprudence. Ruth iv. 9-end.

It is curious to observe how long these "survivals" last. That the phrase *Almoni Peloni* should be not only still in use, but in common use here in England, seems incredible. Nevertheless that it is in common use in the English synagogues is beyond doubt. In his instructive and entertaining *Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History*, Mr. Picciotto incidentally informs us that any *anonymous* donor to the Synagogue funds is habitually styled *Almoni Peloni*. He tells the following curious story of Sampson de Rebuel Abudiente, the very able Jew from whom the well-known Culling-Eardley family descend. In 1754, having previously acquired an immense fortune by speculating in stocks during the panic caused by the Pretender's march on London, Sampson professed himself a Christian, assumed A Modern Illustration.

Ruth iv. 9-end.

the name of Gideon, and brought up his children in the Christian faith.

A Bequest and its issue.

But, like most Jews who have assumed Christianity, he never ceased to be a Jew in heart and faith. When he died, his executors forwarded a copy of his will to the authorities of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation, with a request that orders might be given for the interment of the deceased. This strange clause was found in that document: "To my executors,—£1000 to be paid by them, and applied to and for the use of the Portuguese Synagogue in Bevis Marks, London, in case I should be buried in the Jews' burying-ground at Mile End, in the *carreira* [regular row of graves], with the right of a *guebir* [member], and an *Escaba* [or prayer for the dead] said every *Kippan*." The reply of the Portuguese elders was brief and dignified, and to the effect that orders had been given to the keeper of the burying-ground at Mile End to let the grave be opened according to the desire of the deceased, and that his remains would be treated as those of any other member. Then Phineas Cornes Serra, a gentleman belonging to one of the first families of the community, came forward and stated that a certain sum offered annually by him in the name of *Peloni Almoni,—as anonymous donors were designated,*—was in reality contributed by

the late Sampson Gideon, who had thus regularly kept up his payments as a member of the synagogue. **Ruth iv. 9-end.**

Peloni Almoni, in the person of the unnamed kinsman of Boaz, responds to the summons. And now, his legal adversary or respondent being secured, Boaz sits and watches the citizens as they pass in and out, asking now this and now that grave elder to sit down, until he has ten, the legal number, of the best-reputed men of Bethlehem to act at once as judges and witnesses of his procedure (verse 2). In accordance with Oriental custom, many other citizens, seeing these grave elders assembled, and understanding that the wealthy and pious Boaz had some business of grave importance to transact, would add themselves, unbidden yet not unwelcome, to the company, that they too might hear and see what was going on. **The *Goel* answers.**

Boaz opens the proceedings by formally announcing to his kinsman that Naomi has sold, or is about to sell, the field, the parcel of land, which formerly belonged to their common kinsman Elimelech (verse 3). Naomi may have sold this land to supply her necessities, though, if that were so, one hardly sees how she should have come to extreme want in the lapse of a single year. More probably (comp. verse 5), she may have put it up **Boaz states the Case.**

Ruth iv. 9-end.

for sale for the express purpose of setting the law in motion and compelling her kinsman to redeem it. In either case the kinsman was legally bound both to redeem the estate and to marry Naomi, or, should she waive her claim or be past child-bearing, to marry Ruth. Each of these two women was a childless widow, and each had a claim on the estate. Should neither of them have a child, the family of Elimelech would become extinct, "his name would be put out of Israel."

The Kinsman admits the Claim.

Here clearly, then, was a case in which the *goel* was bound to come forward and do his duty. And, indeed, the *goel* of Naomi admits the claim. Nay, more, so long as he thinks it is only the redemption of Elimelech's land that is in question, he is willing to satisfy the claim. To the appeal and inquiry of Boaz, "Wilt thou redeem?" he formally replies, "I will redeem it" (verse 4).

But what of Ruth?

Now Boaz had set his heart on marrying Ruth, and therefore he must have heard his kinsman's reply with some dismay. But one resource is left him. His kinsman may not admit that he is bound to marry Ruth, or he may not care to marry her, even if he admit the obligation. And hence Boaz now rejoins, "But, if you redeem the land of Elimelech, you must also take Ruth *the Moabitess* to wife, and raise up the name of the

dead man on his inheritance. Are you prepared to do this also?" (verse 5). Ruth iv. 9-end.

The kinsman is not prepared to assume *this* function of the *goel*. And, in an ordinary case, he would have been in no little embarrassment between his reluctance to marry his kinsman's widow and his fear lest, should he refuse, she should inflict the disgraceful penalty of his refusal upon him. But Boaz has made the way easy for him. He has brought neither Naomi nor Ruth with him, so that his kinsman has no indignity to fear. For the present, at least, his shoe will not be pulled off, nor will the slighted and injured woman spit in his face. And, moreover, Boaz has expressed his perfect willingness to discharge all the duties of the *goel* should his kinsman decline them. The Kinsman's Hesitation.

His motive in thus sparing his kinsman is not simply, I suppose, either a kindly consideration for a man closely related to him or his love for Ruth, but also the conviction that an Israelite, caring only for the letter of the law and not for its spirit, might honestly doubt whether he were bound to marry his "brother's" widow *when that widow was a daughter of Moab*. True, Ruth had come to put her trust under the shadow of Jehovah's wings. True, she was known as a good and brave woman in all the city of Bethlehem. The Motive of Boaz.

Ruth iv. 9-end.

But, none the less, she was by birth an alien, one of the heathen women, with whom the sons of Israel were forbidden to intermarry. The law was doubtful: if the appeal to it were pushed too far, he might defeat his own end.

The Kinsman's hesitation natural.

We need not think over hardly, therefore, even of this anonymous kinsman. He may have been, probably he was, a just man according to his lights. Walking by the strict requirements of the law of Israel, he may have honestly doubted whether he were bound to marry Mahlon's *Moabitish* widow. Undoubtedly it was a sin against the Law for Mahlon to have married her while she was a heathen, even if it were not a sin to take her to wife now that she was a proselyte. Could, then, the widow of an illegal marriage claim quite the same rights with a widow of a legal marriage, even though she afterwards became a proselyte to the Hebrew faith? And if he was not bound to marry her, would it be prudent to marry her?

He refuses to Redeem.

Evidently the kinsman thinks it would not be prudent. He declines to redeem, on such terms, the inheritance of his dead kinsman, "*lest I mar mine own inheritance*" (verse 6). By which he meant, I think, that his doubt as to the right conferred on Ruth by the Hebrew law was reinforced by a Hebrew superstition. For, in

Israel, marriage with the daughter of an alien race was held to be "unlucky," even when it was lawful. Many such marriages had proved unhappy and disastrous. And, by expressly calling Ruth *the Moabitess* in his challenge, Boaz seems to have touched his kinsman's superstitious fears. Ruth iv. 9-end.

No doubt, the calamities which had befallen Elimelech and Naomi were popularly attributed to their sojourn in the Field of Moab. No doubt, the popular voice of Bethlehem affirmed that Chilion and Mahlon had been cut off before their time because they had married "strange women." Here, then, was one Hebrew family in imminent danger of extinction solely because of such a marriage as was now proposed. The *goel* fears a similar fate. He fears that, should he marry Ruth, he may "injure his own inheritance,"—fears that he too may die before his time, and his name be put out of Israel. He, therefore, will run no such risk: let Boaz run it, if he will. —Fearing to be cut off.

This, I believe, was his real reason for refusing to discharge the duty of the *goel*. And it is a curious comment on his narrow, selfish ambition that, of this man who was bent on preserving his name and fame, who would run no risk of having his name cut off from the gate of his place, neither Yet he is still unnamed.

Ruth iv. 9-end.

Israel nor the world knows even so much as the mere name. He is unnamed in the very Book which recounts his story; we know him simply as the "anonymous kinsman": while Boaz, who had no such selfish ambition, who held that in every nation they who trust God and work righteousness are acceptable with Him, lives for ever on the sacred page, and is enrolled, together with Ruth, in the pedigree of Him whose Name is above every name.

His right transferred to Boaz.

The anonymous kinsman refuses to redeem Ruth and her inheritance; and, as a symbol and attestation that he cedes all right to the inheritance, he draws off his shoe and hands it to Boaz, transferring to *him* the legal right to plant his foot on the parcel of land left by Elimelech (verses 7, 8). With profound and solemn emotion Boaz calls on the Elders and the circle of bystanders to observe and remember this legal transfer of rights and duties, expressing himself, however, with legal fulness and precision: "Ye are witnesses this day that I have acquired all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I acquired to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren

and from the gate of his place. Ye are witnesses this day." They reply: "We are witnesses"[1] (verses 9-11)—thus completing the legal transaction. Ruth iv. 9-end.

They then break out into a profusion of good wishes which amply verify the statement of Boaz concerning Ruth in the previous Chapter: "All the gate of my people doth know that thou art a good and brave woman." They lift her to the level of the most famous women of Israel by praying that she may be like Rachel and Leah, the mothers of the twelve tribes. And though the words, "The Lord make the woman that cometh unto thy house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel" (verse 11), may probably have already become the usual formula of congratulation and benediction when an Israelitish marriage was announced, yet the fact that this sacred formula was conceded to Ruth *the Moabitess* shows that, at last, the inhabitants of Bethlehem had learned to value her at her true worth. They would not have uttered this prayer if they had not come to esteem her, for her love and piety, as an Israelite indeed. Benediction.

[1] It is probable that in the appeal of Boaz and the response of the Elders we have another "survival" of an ancient system of jurisprudence.

Ruth iv. 9-end.

Boaz marries Ruth.

Boaz, having become the recognised *goel* of Ruth, marries her; and in due time a son is given to them. And now the shadows, which lay so thick on the opening incidents of the story, clear off, and both Naomi and Ruth receive a full reward for their rare and heroic love.

Naomi not forgotten.

It is one of the many fine points of the story that its concluding sentences are almost wholly devoted, not to the young and happy wife and mother, but to Naomi, who had suffered so many calamities, and who, by the piety and resignation with which she bore them, had drawn Ruth from the idolatries of Moab. It is Naomi, not Ruth, whom "the women her neighbours" (verse 14) congratulate on the birth of Ruth's son. In him they see Naomi's *goel*—Ruth already had hers in Boaz; and they pray that, as he grows up, he may restore her to her former happiness and be the stay and gladness of her old age. But though they speak to Naomi, and pray for her, they do not utterly forget the singular virtue of Ruth. In the words, "Thy daughter-in-law, *who loveth thee, who is better to thee than seven sons*" (verse 15), they pronounce on her an eulogy such as few "strange" women could have heard from Hebrew lips. It is because the boy is Ruth's son that he is Naomi's *goel*; for how can he fail to love and cherish the woman whom his

mother has loved with a love even passing that of women? Ruth iv. 9-end.

And so the story closes, not simply leaving these two brave and noble women happy in each other, and in Boaz, and in Obed his son, but weaving for them an immortal crown of honour in that it marks their intimate connection with David, the "darling of Israel," and with Him who was at once David's Son and Lord. "Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David" (verses 21, 22); and of David, as concerning the flesh, came Jesus the Christ, the Light of the Gentiles and the Glory of the people of Israel (Matt. i. 5-16; Luke iii. 23-32). The Honour to come.

It is not every story of faithful love and piety which mounts to so happy a close, at least in this world. But before we complain, as though our virtue had been passed over by our God, it will be well for us to ask ourselves whether our virtue can compare with that of Ruth. It will also be well for us to remember, what Ruth did not know, that godliness has the promise of the life to come, as well as of that which now is, and to rest in the conviction that the longer the promise tarries the richer and sweeter will be its fulfilment. Through the tender mercy of God we most of us get quite as much happiness as is good for us even here, quite as much as, and far more than, we have Virtue's Reward.

Ruth iv. 9-end.

deserved; but, through that same tender and abounding Mercy, we may all get a blessedness far larger than we have deserved hereafter, and shall get it, if only we follow those who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises.

XIII

CHRIST THE *MENUCHAH* OF THE WORLD.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

28. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto you souls.

30. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

XIII

CHRIST THE *MENUCHAH* OF THE WORLD.

MATT. xi. 28-30.

Matt. xi. 28-30. Precious Words.

"WORDS of so sweet breath composed" but rarely fell even from the lips on which sat the law of kindness. In their Divine quickening melody we have a strain which might well create a soul within the very ribs of Death, which *has* given life to many a soul dead in trespasses and sins. Nowhere do we find a more pathetic revelation of the will of God as a saving, life-giving Will. We are conscious of a certain tender and moving beauty in the very sound of the words; and when we pause to consider them, even in their first and most obvious meaning, we become aware of a power in them which attracts and calms our hearts: but only as we deliberately study them, and set them in their proper framework of circumstance and occasion, do we sound their depths of meaning, and feel that they are as full of truth as of grace.

Matt. xi. 28-30. Their Occasion.

If, for instance, we ask, What was the occasion which prompted Jesus to utter them? St Luke's answer (Luke x. 13-22) to the question instantly places them in a new and pathetic light. For he tells us that, while our Lord was lamenting over the unrepentant cities of Galilee, the Seventy returned from their mission with joy, to report the immense and unexpected success of their labours. Everywhere they had been welcomed by the poor and simple. Their message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" had proved a word of power. Moved by compassion for the multitude, who were as sheep without a shepherd, torn and bitten by the wolves, Christ had sent them forth to call the wandering sheep to Him, to *lead* them to Him, the true Shepherd and Bishop of souls. And now, as He listens to the happy tidings they bring Him, His heart expands, and He turns, from lamenting the unbelief of the most favoured of men, to address a gracious and persuasive invitation to the untaught and rude. He hears that *some*, that *many*, are coming to Him, and He longs that *all* should come. He opens His arms, as it were, to the whole world, and cries, "Ho, all ye poor simple souls, despised and oppressed by 'wise' rabbi and 'prudent' priest, smitten and fleeced by the hirelings who should feed and defend you, come unto Me, and

Matt. xi. 28-30.

your wanderings and miseries shall have an end; ye shall find rest unto your souls."

The Lord's Thanksgiving.

The occasion which prompted these gracious words sheds new meaning into them, then, and new pathos. But this occasion moved our Lord to speak to God as well as to men; and we must consider the thanksgiving He addresses to His Father, if we would apprehend the full meaning and beauty of the invitation He extends to the weary and the heavy-laden. He speaks to God, indeed, *before* He speaks to men.

—To God.

His first emotion on hearing the happy tidings brought Him by the Seventy is one of profound and joyful gratitude. In "answer," or response, to their report (see Matt. xi. 25, 26) He lifts up His eyes to heaven, and says: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that, hiding these things from the wise and prudent, Thou hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

—Not for Blindness.

Now, of course, we are not to understand our Lord as rejoicing that the things of the kingdom had been concealed from the learned rabbi and the wise scribe. He had no pleasure in the spiritual blindness of any man. Glad as He was to hear that the simple and unlettered had received the gospel of the Seventy, He would have been still more profoundly glad had the wise and

the prudent received it also. And yet we *are* to understand Him as recognising the will of God in the unbelief of the wise, no less than in the faith of the simple, and as making that Will His own. It *is* an ordinance of Heaven that, while the things of the Spirit are freely disclosed to the simple and childlike heart, they should be concealed from the proud and confident heart. Who are the men that to this very day set themselves most strongly against the revelation of the fatherly goodwill of God? Are they not "the wise," and "the prudent," the men who dabble in science and philosophy, and the men who are much occupied with the affairs of life and keep a keen eye on what they deem "the main chance?" Matt. xi. 28-30.

It is a rule, then, that self-confident wisdom rejects the Revelation which childlike simplicity accepts. This rule, or law, Christ here recognises and states: nay, He adopts, and even rejoices in it, since it expresses the will of God. He who is "the Amen" utters His "So be it" to this canon, or ordinance, of Heaven,—"*Yea*, Father, since so it seemeth good in Thy sight." Why should He not? The law is at once just and merciful. Is it not just, if, when God holds out His hand to lead men to truth and righteousness, they refuse to take it, that they should be left to —But for the Faith of the Simple.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

wander on unguided and unrestrained? Must God drag men, *unwilling*, into the way of salvation? *That* is impossible; for salvation is *in the will*, and consists, indeed, in a voluntary, a cheerful, and unforced, adoption of the Divine Will. The law is just, then: and is it not as merciful as it is just? When men are left to walk in ways of their own choosing, they sooner or later discover that they have missed the way of peace; they fall into unforeseen perils and harms; they learn their need of a Guide to whom all the mysteries of Time and Change and Death lie open as the day: they seize the Hand they once refused. And what can be more merciful than that men should be *constrained*, by the pain and loss and shame which come from walking unguided through life, to accept the guidance of Him to the tender invitations of whose love they long refused to listen?

The Self-Confident Suffer.

It *is* the will of God, then, that the knowledge in which eternal life consists should come only to the simple, childlike heart. This simple and childlike heart it is the very office of true wisdom to induce; but if any are rendered proud and self-confident by the very wisdom which ought to make them docile and humble, it is the righteous will of God that this living and saving knowledge should be "hidden" from them. It *is* hidden

from them—hidden by their own self-confidence and pride. Matt. xi. 28-30.

This law, this determination that the truth shall only be found by wise simplicity and trust, our Lord proceeds still more emphatically to express (verse 27). He affirms that as only the Father knows the Son, so also only the Son knows the Father, and he to whom the Son *wills* to reveal Him. His words seem at first to narrow and obscure our hopes, whether for ourselves or for the world. In express terms we are taught that we lie absolutely at the mercy of the wills of the Father and of the Son, or, rather, at the mercy of Their *will*, since They have but one and the self-same will. And as we listen we feel as though our souls were being fettered in the bonds of an inexorable necessity, an eternal and changeless decree. "What are *we*?" we cry; "and what can we do but stand and wait, if we thus utterly depend on a Will other than our own?" We are at the Mercy of a Higher Will.

Rightly viewed, however, it is this very subjection to a higher Will than our own in which lie our strength and comfort. For this higher Will is also a better and a kinder Will. And, oh, how gloriously does the light rush back upon our thoughts, sweeping away every shadow of despair and suffusing our souls and the whole story of —A Better and Kinder Will.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

Time with the bright hues of an immortal hope, as Christ continues and closes His discourse with the invitation: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." For these final words show us what that Will is on which we depend,—that it is a saving and redeeming Will, a Will bent on giving life and rest to the toilworn and burdened sons of men, to all who feel the weight and curse of sin. Said I not truly, then, that these words are of so sweet breath composed, and ring out so true a melody of "the everlasting chime," that they might well create a soul within the very ribs of Death? Do they not contain, when we read them in their connection, a most pathetic revelation of the sovereign will of God as a saving Will, a Will *set* for the redemption of the world?

But, now that we have placed them in their proper framework of circumstance and occasion, let us look a little more closely at the words themselves, that we may still more deeply enter into their wealth of meaning and grace.

Who are called?

Who are those whom Christ calls to Himself, beseeching them that, by a free movement of the soul, they rise from their bondage to sorrow and care, change the direction of their aim, and turn toward Him as their Refuge, Asylum, Rest? They are all who "labour" as at a yoke, and all

who—in this more miserable than the ordinary beast of draught—are also laden with a heavy burden. But who may these be? What is the spiritual condition set forth under this dolorous image of an ox tugging wearily at a galling yoke, and, at the same time, crouching under the weight of an intolerable burden? If we go to our own hearts for an answer to this question, we shall not be long kept waiting for a reply. Matt. xi. 28-30.

For they only too feelingly persuade us that what we have here set forth, to the very life, is the miserable lot of the transgressor, who, while still attempting to meet the severe demands of duty, is borne down by an intolerable sense of guilt. The Law is the yoke; and the burden is our consciousness of having disobeyed that law. When men sin, they mean to be free. When, in order to gratify the lusts and desires of their hearts, they shake off the fetters and restraints of law, they flatter themselves that they have slipped from every yoke and flung off every burden. "Let us have done with these formal and vexatious restraints," is the thought of their hearts: "let us be free for once to take our own way and follow our own will, to be merry unchecked, to enjoy our life a little before we lose all our power of enjoyment." This is their aim—to be free, merry, glad. The Weary and Burdened. Their Aim.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

Their Disillusion.

But they soon discover that none are so miserable as those who put pleasure before duty, none so cruelly enslaved as those who break all bounds of law. Their sins find them out, breeding consequences, conducting to issues, which they did not anticipate, and which fill them with shame, fear, and self-loathing. The law they have broken avenges itself upon them; they receive the due reward of their deeds. And *now* it is far harder for them than before to restrain their lawless and sensual desires, since use doth breed a habit in a man, and habit soon becomes second nature. *Now* they are tormented by an incessant craving for indulgence; and they are the more tempted to yield to it by the hope that, in fresh indulgence, they may lose, at least for a moment, the intolerable sense of shame and guilt which hangs upon them like a weight. More unhappy than the goad-driven ox, they are laden with a burden, while yet they tug hopelessly at a yoke.

Their Opportunity.

To all who are in this strait of misery, to all who feel the burden of sin, to all who have sunk into bondage by their very endeavour to be free, to all who are fevered with the unrest which springs from conflicting aims and desires, Christ cries: "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

The Promised Rest.

But what is the "*rest*" He promises us? *How* may we secure it?

Christ the *Menuchah* of the World

The Hebrew word which our Lord doubtless used, the word for "rest," has an instructive history: it would be charged with sacred associations to those who heard it fall from His lips. For this word *menuchah*, as we have seen,[1] is used in many weighty sentences in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is used to designate the asylum of honour and freedom which a Hebrew wife found in the home of her husband, her refuge from servitude, insolence, neglect. It is also used to denote the asylum of freedom and repose on which the Hebrew race entered when it gained full possession of the Promised Land, when, in the days of Solomon, every man might sit under his vine or his fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid. It was used by the Prophets in a still higher sense: with them *God* was the true *menuchah*, or rest, of His people, nay, of the whole world: to them it was revealed that only when the Immanuel came, the God-with-us, would the golden days of Paradise return, and the world enter into its final and glorious rest.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

So then those who first listened to our Saviour's gracious Invitation, those on whose weary and fevered spirits His promise of "rest" first fell, would understand that He was offering them an asylum of repose, honour, freedom, such as the

—As understood by the Hearers.

See pages 80 and following.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

Hebrew wife found in her husband's house, such as the Hebrew race found in the sacred land when it was wholly their own, such as the Hebrew Prophets had found in God in the moments of their loftiest inspiration. Nay, more, in proportion as they were familiar with the prophetic writings—which they daily read in school and synagogue—they would understand that Jesus of Nazareth was claiming to be the Anointed One of God, the promised Immanuel, the Lord of that sacred kingdom, that golden age, in which, redeemed from its confusion and strifes, the world should rise to its golden close and enter into an everlasting peace.

—And as interpreted by us.

And *we* must understand Him as offering us no less a "rest" than this. He calls us from the noise, from the contentions and rivalries, from the vulgar ambitions and feverish unrest of life, from shame and remorse, from the fear of change and the fear of evil, into a secure and happy asylum in which we may dwell in honour and freedom, unalarmed by the loud uproars of the world, unfretted by its cares and vexations, untainted by its pollutions, unstained by its guilt. He summons us to "God, who is our home," to God as revealed in Him who is our peace. "Come unto Me," He cries; "let there be a free, glad movement of your will toward Me; claim Me for

your Redeemer and Helper, and you shall find yourselves in a happy and inviolable Rest, secure from all the shocks of change, from all the wiles and assaults of evil! Matt. xi. 28-30.

But *how* can this be? Is it possible that this supreme good—rest, a free and honourable rest for our weary and fretted spirits—is open to us all? And if it be, how may we possess ourselves of it? To this question Christ replies, "*Come unto Me*, and I will give you rest." And by coming to Him, He meant, of course, that we should make a spiritual approach toward Him; that we should trust in Him: that we should heartily believe in that Revelation of the Divine Love and Mercy which He came to make. So long as our spirits are galled and oppressed by a sense of guilt, so long as we lie under the heavy and weary weight of unforgiven sins, rest is impossible to us. The very first thing we have to do, therefore, if we would enter into the rest of Christ, is to exercise faith in the atonement He has wrought, in the demonstration He has made of God's willingness to save us from our sins, if only we confess and renounce them, and to infuse into us the power of that endless life which is prolific in all the fruits of righteousness and charity.

How can the Rest be reached?

By trusting Our Lord.

By His "Come unto Me," again, He means not simply that we are to acquiesce in, to accept, His

By obeying His Will.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

revelation of the forgiving and redeeming will of God, but also that we are to strenuously adopt and obey that pure and gracious Will. We enter into rest, not by leaning indolently against the Cross and warbling dainty hymns of praise, but by manfully taking up the Cross, and showing ourselves to be of one spirit with Him who gave Himself, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. The faith that saves is not only the faith which trusts in what Christ has done for us: it is also the faith which works by love, to produce in us a love like His own. If, as we listen to the invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," our first thought is, "Thank God, we have done with yokes and burdens, with obligations and restraints; we may lie down and take our rest, and leave all to Christ," we simply show that, in our impatience, we have wholly mistaken His meaning.

Taking up His Yoke and His Burden.

For to the promise of rest, and in order that it may be fulfilled, He Himself immediately goes on to say, "Take *My yoke* upon you, and *My burden*, and learn of Me." From which it is obvious that, so far from having escaped obligation and restraint by our faith in Him, we still have much to learn, much to do, much to bear; so far from having done with yokes and burdens,

we are invited to wear a new yoke, to assume a new burden. And it is for this call to new endeavours and new endurances that we ought to be thankful, rather than for an imaginary and impossible enfranchisement from obligations and restraints, and for which we are thankful the very moment we pause and reflect. Matt. xi. 28-30.

There is no *rest* in indolence, but the cruellest unrest. There is no freedom in lawlessness, but the most terrible bondage. We rise into our true *menuchah* and true rest only when all our faculties are fully and happily engaged, and yet are not strained and fevered with anxiety. Did the Hebrew bride, when she found her "rest" in her husband's home, sink into listless indolence? On the contrary, new happy duties and responsibilities were laid upon her; and in the faithful discharge of these she rose to her true dignity and honour and peace. When the children of Israel entered into their "rest," when the Promised Land was all their own, did they fall into an inglorious ease? On the contrary, they were never so active as in the age of David and Solomon; they reared their noblest buildings, engaged in their widest commerce, raised their most abundant harvests, wrote their finest chronicles and poems. And if we truly respond to the calls of Christ, we shall not find our

Our Rest not Indolence, but Zealous Labour.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

"rest" in an indolent and inglorious ease, but in the new order and energy of our life, in doing all we do as unto Him, in more abundant labours for the good of others, in bearing the inevitable sorrows and losses of life with a more constant spirit, and in that sincere and cordial trust in the Providence and purposes of God which can alone arm us against the stings and frets of care.

Labour becoming Rest and Duty a Delight.

It is not *work*, but *worry*, that kills. It is not the duties and labours we have to discharge which fever and perturb our spirits; but our ambitions, our rivalries, our anxieties for the present and for the future, for ourselves and for our children. We waste and are consumed in the fire of an inward restlessness, not because we have so much to do, but because we do not carry to all our labours a composed and trustful spirit. Did we but come to Christ, and learn of Him to live in a constant affiance and communion with the Father who careth for us, our very labour would become a rest, and our duty our delight. *He* was as poor as any of us. He was dependent for daily bread on the casual charity of His friends; and His friends were few, and not rich in this world's goods. He was as busily, as exhaustively, occupied as any of us. And yet He was redeemed from all care, from all fear,

and out of the abundance of His peace gave peace to as many as drew near to Him. Who ever found *Him* apprehensive of what to-morrow might bring forth? Who ever heard *Him* complain that His burden was too heavy or His work too hard? Matt. xi. 28-30.

—As we learn of Christ.

Christ, then, has a right to say to us, and to as many as long for a tranquil heart, "Learn of *Me:* learn of Me, that you may enter into My rest." And in His grace He does say it; nay, in large measure He explains to us, by the very terms of His invitation, the secret of that "rest" which He asks us to share with Him. For He virtually says: "Come to Me; learn of Me; for I, too, am under the yoke. *I* keep and magnify the law which you have to obey. But I am meek and lowly of heart, not haughty and self-assertive; and therefore the yoke does not gall Me. I *love* the law I keep: how, then, should it be a burden to Me? If you love it, it will be but an easy yoke and a light burden to you. Obey the pure and gracious Will of God with a meek and lowly heart, and you shall find rest to your souls." And, beyond a doubt, if we heartily respond to His call, if we do love the Will we have to obey, though to our weakness it must always seem a yoke, the yoke will not gall us; we shall find, at least, that rest which comes from

Matt. xi. 28-30.

having the ruling aim and desire of our soul satisfied.

How some fail.

If any ask, "How is it, then, that, though we believe in Christ, *we* are still weary and heavy laden, still toiling under a weight of cares and apprehensions which grows as we advance, still restless with anxieties about our children, our future, our spiritual condition and prospects?" we can now answer them with the very words of Christ. We need not say, in general terms, "Your faith is weak, inconstant, wavering," although that is only too true both of us and of them: we can also point out exactly what it is that they have failed to learn, and need to learn, of Him. He was *meek and lowly of heart. That* is why the yoke sat so lightly on Him.

—From lack of meekness and lowliness of heart.

But are we? Are they? Who does not see that many of our most biting cares, if not all of them, spring from our self-love, our self-assertion, our high thoughts of ourselves, and of what is due to us, of "what we may fairly expect"? Instead of being "meek," we are quick and sudden to resent slights and wrongs, and even to imagine them. Instead of being "lowly of heart," we are full of ambitions to excel or surpass our neighbours, to lay up a greater store, to make a greater show, to get before or above them, and

compel them to minister to our vanity, greed, reputation, comfort. Alas, this conception of ourselves as in some way better than our neighbours is native and habitual to us, and often discloses itself in the very heat and resentment with which we disclaim it. And how can we enter into "rest," the rest of Christ, while we hold this high opinion of ourselves and our deserts, while our hearts are torn by these selfish and vulgar ambitions? He who was the Lord of all became the Servant of all. If *we* are still more conscious of our "rights" than of our duties, of our "claims" than of our obligations, we still need to learn of Him who was meek and lowly of heart the very rudiments of that sacred and Divine Rest in which His pure Spirit found an asylum from the clamours and rivalries and conflicts of the world.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

This secret of the Lord is not with those who are wise and prudent, strong or great, in their own conceits; but with those who are of a meek, humble, and childlike heart; who live in a constant intercourse with the great Lord and Lover of Souls, and who learn of Him to chasten their desires, to moderate their aims, to purify and raise their wills, to look for rest in labour, for freedom in obedience, for honour in service.

The Secret of them that fear Him.

Matt. xi. 28-30.

Christ, then, is the true *Menuchah* of the world; for in proportion as men believe in Him He takes away their sins, and gives them to share in His own ineffable and unbroken peace.

XIV

CHRIST THE TRUE *GOEL* OF MEN

Ruth ii. 20.

And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

XIV

CHRIST THE TRUE *GOEL* OF MEN

RUTH ii. 20.

Ruth ii. 20.

IT may be worth while to define the functions of the Hebrew *Goel* more exactly, and to show more in detail how in the Lord Jesus Christ we have the Divine "Substance" which cast that prophetic "shadow" before.

The Three Questions for the *Goel*.

We learn from the Pentateuch that the main functions of the *Goel* were three, or, rather, that there were three tragic contingencies in which the legal Redeemer and Avenger was bound to interpose—each of which was, in the very nature of things, of much more frequent occurrence than the case recorded in the Book of Ruth. 1. If any Hebrew had fallen into such penury as that he was compelled to part with his ancestral estate, the *Goel* was bound to purchase it, and, after certain conditions had been observed, to restore it to his impoverished kinsman. 2. If any Hebrew had been taken captive, or had sold himself for a

slave, the *Goel* was bound to pay the price of his redemption, to unloose and set him free. 3. If any Hebrew had suffered grievous wrong, or had been slain, the *Goel* was bound to exact compensation for the wrong, or to avenge his murder. A brief examination of these three functions of the *Goel* will open up to us their moral and prophetic significance, and perchance constrain us to say, with a keener accent of conviction and gratitude, "The man Christ Jesus is near of Kin to us, our nearest Kinsman, the true *Goel* of the whole race."

Ruth iii. 20.

1. *The Forfeited Inheritance.*—If an Israelite, weighed down by penury, had sold his estate, or any part of it, any one of his near kinsmen who was able to do so was enjoined to purchase it, that it might not remain in the hands of the stranger or the alien. For a time, till the year of Jubilee, the estate was his; but when the silver trumpets announced that the year of Jubilee had come, it reverted to its original owner. Even before then the vendor might at any moment redeem or reclaim it, if he were able to pay back the purchase money, or an equitable proportion of it, should his kinsman have already enjoyed the use and produce of the land for a term of years; but in any case it returned to him in the year of Jubilee.

1. The Forfeited Inheritance.

Ruth ii. 20. The Law Vindicated.

The object and good policy of this statute are obvious. Moses was statesman enough to know that the yeomen who live on and farm their own land are the strength and backbone of a country: he set himself, therefore, to preserve their number unimpaired. Hence he made it legally impossible for them to cede the land itself; all they could sell was the use and the fruits of it for a limited term of years—a fact which was duly considered, no doubt, in the price for which it was sold. In fifty years, at the farthest, every plot of land reverted to the family to which it originally belonged: and thus, for many centuries at least, the country was parcelled out mainly among those small proprietors who are found to be the most thrifty and expert tillers of the soil, and whose patriotism is commonly more stedfast and more ardent than that of any other class.

Its inner Meaning.

The political sagacity of this enactment is obvious enough, then; nor are its prophetic meaning and reference far to seek. For of whom can the Israelite, sunk in penury and alienating his original inheritance, be the type but of fallen man? God made him upright, clothed him with glory and honour, set him over all the works of His hands. And he, violating the conditions of loyalty and obedience on which it was held,

alienated the broad and fair inheritance, leaving himself heir only to shame and want and death. All things were his; but, by his sin, he put them all into the hands of the Stranger and the Adversary; so that, for his sake, and through his sin, the whole creation, of which under God he was lord, has been brought under the sorrowful and obscuring shadows of vanity and corruption. And who can the *Goel* be but that Divine Kinsman—bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh—who has redeemed and restored the inheritance we had forfeited? "All things are ours" already—made ours by His grace—if we are His, even the sorrows and imperfections of earth and time: and when the trumpet shall sound and the great Jubilee is come, even the creation also, our original inheritance, shall be delivered from all the shadows of imperfection, out of that bondage to vanity and corruption to which we have subjected it, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Ruth ii. 20.

2. *The Forfeited Liberty.*—To discharge a debt, or to save himself from the last extremities of want, a Hebrew might sell *himself* either to a stranger or a fellow-citizen. If he sold himself to an Israelite, he was treated, not as a slave, but as a hired servant, and became free even from those light bonds so soon as the year of Jubilee 2. The Forfeited Liberty.

Ruth ii. 20.

arrived. But if he sold himself to a stranger, a foreigner, he became a slave; and in that case any "one of his brethren" was permitted to interpose, and to pay the price of his redemption.

The Law again Vindicated.

Here, again, it is easy to see why the Mosaic law enjoined and limited the interposition of the *Goel.* If the man were in the hands of an Israelite, he lost none of his rights and privileges; he was still a member of the Divine Commonwealth, of the Holy Congregation. There was no need, therefore, to interpose on his behalf. But if his master were a foreigner, a heathen, he might, and probably would, be withdrawn from the Commonwealth, and lose his standing as one of the chosen people. And if Moses would not suffer a single yeoman to be lost, much less would he suffer a single *man* to be lost to Israel. For the Hebrew who became a slave to a heathen, therefore, the *Goel* was to interpose.

With its inner Meaning.

Here, too, the prophetic intention of the enactment is as plain and obvious as its political intention. For we men were "sold under sin," led captive at the will, not of a brother and an equal, but of an alien and adverse spirit. Our freedom was gone; we were in a cruel bondage. We could neither break our bonds in sunder nor

ransom ourselves with a price. We had lost our place and standing in the Congregation, among the sons, of God. And Christ has proved Himself our *Goel* by "giving Himself a ransom for all," by redeeming us, "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold," but with His own "precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Ruth ii. 20.

3. *The Forfeited Life.*—"The avenger of blood," of whom we so often read in our English Version, is in the Hebrew simply "the *Goel*," the kinsman-redeemer, who, in virtue of his kinsmanship, becomes an avenger of wrongs. If a murder were done in Israel, the pursuit and execution of the murderer devolved on the next of kin. If the kinsmen of the murdered man were not at hand, no stranger had the right of arrest, and still less the right to revenge. Unmolested, the homicide betook himself to the nearest city of refuge, where he found a secure asylum until he could be brought before the judges of the land. 3. The Forfeited Life.

To us this may seem to be, as indeed it was, but a rude form of justice. Its very rudeness, however, adapted it to those rude times. Judges were few; their circuits were rarely and slowly travelled, and were often interrupted for long and indefinite periods. And if, on the one hand, the Rude justice —but salutary.

Ruth ii. 20.

Goel might avenge a murder, not waiting for session and legal verdict; on the other hand, none but the next of kin could thus take the law into his own hands: and, always, the cities of refuge were open to all. In those rude and early times, perhaps no more equitable arrangement could have been made. It did not foster, or enjoin, revenge; it defined and limited it, bringing within narrow legal bounds the wide unlimited revengefulness of the natural Eastern man. It was better that the *Goel*, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, should chase the flying felon along the road that led to the sacred city, or even that he should thrust him through with a dart, than that a blood-feud should be permitted to spring up between family and family, clan and clan, such as was common among the neighbouring tribes.

A greater "Wrath" Foreshadowed.

And even the Lamb of God has a certain "wrath"; even in Him who was meek and lowly of heart we may find that which answers to the avenging function of the Hebrew *Goel*. Christ came to destroy as well as to redeem; to destroy, that He might redeem. He followed after that great enemy of our souls of whom the Hebrew "shedder of blood" was a type, and smote him that "was a murderer from the beginning." To avenge the world for all that it had suffered at

the hands of the powers of evil, to redeem it from its bitter thraldom to them, He "despoiled the principalities and powers of evil, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross." Ruth ii. 20.

There is one feature of the *Goel* which comes out very markedly, whatever the function he had to discharge. Whether redeeming an alienated inheritance, restoring liberty to a captive, or hunting down a homicide, he is in each case a kinsman, one of the nearest kin. *Kinship with the redeemed*, in short, *is an invariable law and condition of redemption.* And this law holds of the Divine *Goel.* "Forasmuch as we were partakers of flesh and blood, Christ also Himself took part in the same." None but a man could be the *Goel* of men. No alien, no stranger, could interpose for us; only "the Man who is near of kin to us, our nearest Kinsman." Hence the Son of God became the Son of Man. The Kinsman.

In thus speaking of the redemption wrought for us and for all men by our Divine Kinsman, it must not for a moment be supposed that we are playing with mere fancies and figures of speech. Under this manifold and most appropriate image we have presented to us the supreme facts in the moral history of the world, the truths which have Not Fancy here, but Fact.

Ruth ii. 20.

most profoundly entered into our spiritual experience. No poor Hebrew who had been compelled to part with the fields he had inherited from his fathers suffered a loss comparable with ours, when, by sin, we had lost the righteousness, the right relation to God and man, in which we were originally placed by the Father of our spirits. No Hebrew sold, or selling himself, for a slave to a hard and alien master, ever endured a bondage half so bitter and shameful as that into which we fell when, sold under sin, we sank into bondage to our own lusts. No deliverance wrought by a Hebrew *Goel* is worthy to be compared with that by which Christ has made it possible for us to subdue our evil passions and lusts, and to possess ourselves of a righteousness more stable and more perfect than that which we had cast away.

Thanksgiving for its Reality.

If we are conscious that this happy change has passed in us; if we know and feel that we are no longer mastered and coerced by the lusts which war against the soul, that Christ has conferred on us, not simply the pardon of our sins, but also the liberty of a growing obedience to the righteous will of God; if we can look abroad with an unpresumptuous eye, and say, "All things are ours, and work together for our good";—then, with a fervour and a triumph infinitely transcend-

ing that of Naomi, we may exclaim, "This Man is near of kin to us, our nearest Kinsman. Blessed be He of the Lord, who hath not left off His kindness to the living and to the dead!" Ruth ii. 20.

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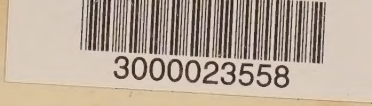
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